



ALL FOR THE BEST.

VOL. I.

LONDON
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NEW-STREET SQUARE

ALL FOR THE BEST:

A Story of Quiet Life.

“ So, He bringeth them to the haven where they would be.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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To My Sister.

ALL FOR THE BEST.

PROLOGUE.

MRS. SHARRUP was having her best plum-coloured silk dress cleaned and turned and made up again.

A fact whereof the household had been 'ware for some days. Not that Mrs. S. was in any way given to undue anxiety touching the decoration of her outer woman ; she was thankful to say, that having been for the last twenty years a joined member of the Old Street congregation, she had quite got over all that sort of thing, though she wouldn't deny that there might have been a time, for instance, a few years before she married the present Mr. Sharrup, when she used to be slightly under bondage to the pomps and vanities of the world. But, and she didn't care, not she, if all

Marbrook, including the minister of the Old Street congregation, heard her say it, a silk dress *was* a silk dress, and ought to have a proper amount of respect paid to it, and proper care taken of it, and cleaned when the time came for cleaning it, with a becoming seriousness, and not as if you were putting a bit of sixpenny print through the wash tub. It had been on her mind a long time,—in fact, ever since that testimonial party to the minister last Christmas, when Mrs. Sweeper, the draper's wife, let a piece of buttered muffin fall off her plate and make a great grease spot right in the very middle of the front breadth — why did people go to tea parties if they hadn't the proper use of their hands? she should like to know — it had been on her mind ever since that tea party to have her best plum-coloured silk taken to pieces and cleaned. And as Christmas was drawing on again, and it was only reasonable to think she should be asked out now and then by her friends to spend a chatty evening with them, and as she had nothing else that was decent, except a blue flounced mohair, she thought she couldn't do better than have it to pieces at once, and let Miss Smart come and make it up.

Mrs. Sharrup wasn't going to have that dress

of hers sent to the dyer's, and steeped in those villainous compounds that people use now-a-days. Not a bit of it. Her mother, thank goodness! had always brought her up to do things for herself, and to look with wholesome contempt on new-fangled tricks and ways. Turnem and Tintit, those people in the corner shop turning down to the Abbey Road, might say what they liked about their new patent process, and pester her with circulars and cards;—how did they know she had a silk dress to clean? she wondered, — from week end to week end; but she knew better than to be come round over in that sort of way, and have her things spoilt for want of resolution enough to set to and do them herself. Hadn't Miss Tim, the maiden lady at No. 5, Braeton Villas, sent that beautiful watered silk of hers only the week before last to be dyed brown, and didn't it come back all over speckles and streaks, so that it wasn't fit to be made up again, and had to be turned into a petticoat?—such waste. And hadn't Miss Dale, the minister's daughter, too, sent her bonnet strings,—those sweet pretty bonnet strings, blue with a white stripe down the middle, and a black velvet leaf on each side,—to be cleaned and done up? and when she came into the Old Street

chapel next Sunday everybody wondered what she'd been doing with them, they looked such a figure. And was she, Mahala Sharrup, a woman who had brought up a family on her own practical experience, going to be drawn into any such nonsense?—no indeed.

So the silk dress aforementioned was reverently taken to pieces, brushed, dusted, and the thread-ends picked out by Mrs. Sharrup's own proper fingers. Then it went through hydropathic treatment in the shape of successive douches of potato-water, varying judiciously in degrees of heat and strength, followed by a homœopathic sprinkling of gum and gall drops, and lastly, it underwent severe allopathic measures of mangling and ironing, which left it in a finished state of gloss and perfectness quite refreshing to Mrs. Sharrup's sensibilities.

She would not deny, and she didn't wish to do it either, that it had given her "part" trouble:—when, she should like to know, was anything done without trouble? The family wash had been put off on account of it; the apprentices and young men in the shop had sat down to cold meat and no pudding for three days running; she had been obliged to forego the monthly sewing

meeting at Old Street,—that choice little gossiping opportunity,—in order that she might see the precious material safely through the mangle on the eve of its ironing morn. She had got a pain in her right shoulder in consequence of her vigorous exertions during the potato-water treatment;—not that she cared for pain, no indeed, she was thankful to say she had a mind entirely above such nonsense as that; but poor Mr. Sharrup, who was such a molly-coddle, would have it was rheumatism, and that riled her so. And in the last place, Nettie, the youngest daughter of her house and heart, a pretty little red-haired mischief of four years old, had taken the opportunity, whilst her mamma's back was turned, of investigating the contents of the gum bottle, a piece of adventurous research which had issued in the descent of the entire mixture upon her braided Holland pinafore and merino frock, adding thereto divers little extempore figures and beautifications not contemplated in the original design.

But these were mere trifles. Mrs. Sharrup had a soul that would look above them. She had gained her point. Never had the goddess of cleanliness been so successfully worshipped, or deigned so propitious a response to her humble

votaries. Not a spot, speckle, stain, or streak marred the immaculate surface of those seven breadths of plum-coloured silk, which, together with the side pieces, back pieces, shoulder, breast, and sleeve ditto, lay spread out in silent dignity on Mrs. Sharrup's back parlour table, waiting the friendly offices of Miss Smart, the dressmaker.

But, "dearie me to-day!" as the bustling little woman herself was so fond of saying, to think that we should have told you all this long rhodomontade about a silk dress, and never so much as introduced you in a legitimate manner to the owner of it and her belongings.

Mr. Fentiman Sharrup was a well-to-do tradesman in the grocery line, carrying on his business at Ceylon House, that substantial-looking shop with stone facings and large plate glass windows just as you turn the corner of Marbrook marketplace to go down the Braeton Road. A smart, dapper little man, with frizzy grey hair and whiskers, a quick, active step and peculiar oscillatory motion of the head, acquired no doubt by the frequent bows which during the thirty years of his business life he had been under the necessity of making to his customers. In his youth he had been a comely, well-favoured individual, judg-

ing from the fact that the lady who now presided over his hearth and home, kept his linen mended and his children suitably dressed, and had his larder and himself under equally despotic control, was Mrs. Sharrup number three. Of her predecessors, whatever might have been their special excellences or defects, he preserved no mementoes whatsoever, save two portraits which were hung up in the best bedroom, and three blooming daughters, Miss Phebe, Miss Rachel, and Miss Julia, aged respectively twenty, eighteen, and ten. Also, a deep drawer in one of the top attics, full of laces, ribbons, muslins, and other feminine adornments, which were handed out from time to time to the three young ladies aforesaid, to be by them adapted and transmogrified as existing fashions should seem to demand. For Mr. Sharrup was not a man of sentiment, not given to mope as some people do over by-gone memories or musty relics of old loves, or any such insignificant frivolities. He was quite content with doing his duty to numbers one and two so long as they were in a position to need it, and when the Marbrook surgeon had handed them, one after another, safely beyond the reach of his kindly offices, why, it just seemed to him the most

sensible thing in the world that he should, after keeping his hat-band going for a suitable length of time, cast about for some one else whereon to exercise those same kindly offices. Anyhow he was quite sure of one thing, that if everybody in the world treated their wives as well as he had always made a point of treating his, there wouldn't be half so many unhappy homes as one hears of in these days, judging from newspapers and divorce cases.

The two elder Misses Sharrup, as they successively emerged from Miss Minfin's finishing establishment in Mossingay Terrace, and returned, with all the glories and immunities of young ladyhood, to the paternal hearth and back parlour, had more than once suggested the advisability of taking a country house, and living apart from the business, the too constant presence of sugar, spices, and coffee being somewhat repugnant to their educated sensibilities, especially to those of Miss Phebe, the eldest born, who, in virtue of very light hair, and an extremely colourless complexion, had assumed the sentimental style, patronised pale blue ribbons and pensive, half-uncurled ringlets, and kept an extract book, bound in pink with a pierced heart on the back,

for pretty pieces of poetry. Rachel, too, a black-eyed, stylish-looking girl, was nowise loth in backing Phebe's arguments; suggesting with touching daughterly affection the benefit which would accrue to her dear papa's health from a diurnal reinforcement of fresh air, besides the genteeler aspect which would be imparted to the business, and the greater facilities for getting herself and her sister properly settled in life, which desirable end, Miss Rachel blushed not to affirm, had a right to be considered as the sole object of a young lady's aspiration after leaving school.

But Mr. Sharrup was a wide-awake little man, and keenly alive, as the most touchy parishioner of a former dispensation would ever have been, to the evils of non-residence; and though graciously permitting Rachel to launch out into an annual white-glove tea party on her own account, and Phebe to expatiate to her heart's content in azure draperies and cheap editions of the British poets, he stuck firm as a limpet in its shell to the corner shop in Marbrook market-place as you turn down to the Braeton Road. So while the two graces, in the persons of the two Misses Sharrup, lolled gracefully on the sofas, manufacturing

startling specimens of natural history in Berlin wool and bead work, and the remaining grace, in the form of the ten-year-old Julia, did the best that in her lay to worrit out the patience of her teachers and to make as much trouble in the world as she possibly could before joining her sisters in their grown-up privileges,—while Mrs. Sharrup bore upon her carefully combed false front of brown curls the tiara of domestic government, and little Nettie, the youngest born, toddled about at her mother's heels, eating surreptitious lunches and tit-bits from getting up to bed-time, occasionally penetrating into that land of Goshen, the front shop, and bringing from thence stray currants and handfuls of sugar,—Mr. Fentiman Sharrup sat behind the green curtains of his desk, listening to the pleasant chink of money over the counter, and musing with calm-eyed contentment on the long ranges of japanned canisters, the cases of fancy biscuits, the regiments of pickle bottles and far-spreading range of comestibles which 'bound his horizon, until, the last lingering customer having crossed the threshold, and the sleepy apprentices mounted to their dormitories, his stool of state was exchanged for the back parlour hearth, where, with a newspaper, and

perhaps a glass of hot spirits and water, he got over the rest of his time.

Unless there chanced to be a call from without. For Mr. Sharrup was a public-spirited man, took an active part in the elections, was a member of the town council, and, as the aspiring Rachel did not scruple to assert, was at no impracticable distance from the mayoralty itself and a twelve-months' residence in the Mansion House. Then he was a great frequenter of committees, lectures, public meetings, parish parliaments, anything in fact that was respectable, and didn't begin until after eight o'clock, when the shop was closed and the things put away; for, as we have hinted before, Mr. Sharrup was practical, like his wife, and never forgot that business is business, and a shop is a shop, and that both need attending to. A very estimable little man on the whole, a very estimable little man indeed, though he did not pull long faces over the relics of his former wives, nor wear their photographs on his shirt studs, and was never observed to sigh over old letters and those sorts of things, nor to say, with a pitiful drawing down of the corners of his lips, "So many years ago to-day."

Thus much, then, for the interior mechanism of

Ceylon House, the corner shop in Marbrook market-place. And now to return to that plum-coloured silk dress which has been lying on the table in the back parlour all this time.

It was Thursday morning. Mrs. Sharrup had made a desperate dash at the household work, and pushed it all out of the road, in some direction or other, by ten o'clock, in order to have a clear coast for the energies of Miss Smart, the dress-maker, who, having despatched her supernumerary breakfast of toast and coffee, had produced from her black bag the November fashion book, spread out her scissors, tapes, and patterns on the table, and was now cutting out the side pieces of the dress,—good substantial ones too, for Mrs. Sharrup was by no means a shrimp of a woman,—pursing up her thin colourless lips the while into a series of shapes corresponding as accurately as circumstances would allow to the angles and curves of her artistic design.

Miss Lavinia Smart was a notable specimen of the inaptitude and misapplication of names, being as faded and washed out a specimen of womanhood as any the town of Marbrook had ever produced. A black merino dress (Miss Smart never wore anything but black with two flounces), a

pinched-in waist, and draggling sleeves, surmounted by a bead-work collar, formed the salient points of her outer construction. The extreme edge of this same collar having, for reasons best known to itself, disagreed and parted company with its companion festoons, hung down here and there after the manner of a fringe, from time to time dropping away in sparkling crystals to the carpet, whence they were eagerly picked up by the delighted Nettie, and after being stuck to her little fat finger-ends, and duly held up for admiration, were transferred to that miscellaneous receptacle of stolen goods which she denominated her "pottit."

Who does not know the anxieties and pleasures and triumphs of having a dress made "in the house?"—the eager consultation of fashion books, the almost parental interest which is felt in the progress of the article, the successive periods of trying on,—first at that initiatory stage when the lining is cut out and pinned together; second, the more advanced formation, when the outer material has been tacked on, and the hooks and eyes adjusted; thirdly, the measurement of the sleeves and length of the skirt; fourthly and lastly, the triumphant entrance into the complete fabric,

which investiture is usually completed towards the close of the day, as your "Miss Prissy" gets her supper, starting up every now and then to arrange a fold, or take out a lurking "basting thread," or settle a ribbon, or stroke down a plait. Then you take a turn up and down the room to see "how it is for length," and papa or the husband is sent for to admire the triumphant achievement before it is carried reverently away to the wardrobe in the best lodging room, there to be turned inside out and hung up by the sleeves in solemn state until such time as you shall be invited out to tea, and give it its first introduction to society. Oh, ye fashionable denizens of London squares and west-end suburbs, you, who send your twenty or thirty yards of *gros de Naples* or *moire antique* to the court milliner, and straightway abjure all rule, authority, and power over it until the lady's maid brings it to you, poised on her finger tips, while the carriage is waiting at the door to take you to the ball or dinner party, where you hope its beauty, if not your own, will stamp you the belle of the evening! is it possible that you have ever sat down and seriously considered the amount of pure, unadulterated, unmixed, almost Elysian enjoyment which you

throw away by not having your dresses made "in the house," as Mrs. Sharrup did?

She liked having a dressmaker coming to work for her. People might say what they liked about its not being so genteel as having one's things put out to make, but she hadn't a deal of society at the best of times, and she always liked to know how things were going on at Marbrook; and nobody knew so much about everybody else as Miss Smart did; to say nothing of her being so willing to tell what she knew, and not caring if people *did* call her a gossip. She had heard it said by censorious, narrow-minded individuals, that Miss Smart often did a deal of mischief by going about and talking as she did; but she, Mrs. Sharrup, didn't care a pin for what such ill-tempered folks said. What *did* people get engaged and married for? she should like to know; and why did they have their little quarrels and differences? and why did they give their servants warning, and make a fail of it in business, and launch out into extravagance, and so forth, if such things weren't to be talked over and looked into by other folks? She didn't believe in such nonsense, not she, as keeping oneself to oneself and not meddling with things; and as long as her name

was Mahala Sharrup, she should make it a point of duty to know what was stirring, and to employ Miss Smart for that purpose.

“Shocking occurrence this about the Harcourts,” said the dressmaker, when the pins and needles had been got together, the balls of cotton hunted up, and the two elder Misses Sharrup and their “ma” provided with something to do in behalf of the plum-coloured silk. “Shocking occurrence this about the Harcourts; have you heard of it yet, ladies?”

“No; do tell, Miss Smart; this is the first whisper I’ve heard of it. You don’t mean the Harcourts of Braeton, do you?” said Rachel, coming to a halt in the middle of a breath, holding her needle out at arm’s length and her mouth open, ready for the news about the Harcourts of Braeton Lodge.

“The very same, Miss: they live retired, you know. A stiff, proud sort of a man enough, folks say he is; but I reckon this’ll cut him up, if anything will. That boy of theirs took croup and died day before yesterday. Wasn’t over three hours altogether before he was gone, after first beginning.”

“La! now, Miss Smart, you don’t call that

anything so very particular. I reckon nothing of a child like that dying. I made myself sure one of the young ladies had run away and got married, or something of that sort. Why, that's no news at all ;” and Rachel set to at her seam again with a disappointed expression of countenance.

“ Rachel,” said Mrs. Sharrup severely, “ such remarks are unbecoming in a young person of your age. How often have I instructed you to manifest a proper seriousness when you hear of anybody dying ? Dear me, Miss Smart, you don't say so ; and such a very likely-looking boy as he was, too. But I've heard people say that croup takes young children off wonderful fast ! I remember an aunt of mine telling me once about a child of hers that was took with —— Nettie, *will* you let that reel of cotton alone, then ? Haven't I told you twenty times never to meddle with anything on the table ? Get along into the kitchen with you, and don't come back till you're sent for.”

Nettie descended slowly from her high chair, looking all the while steadfastly at her Ma ; and stuffing one little red hand as far as it would go into her mouth, she proceeded slowly towards the kitchen, from which half an hour after she

emerged with an elaborate design etched in preserve upon her white pinafore.

"My aunt's child," continued Mrs. Sharrup, "was took with that new throat complaint, and went off in almost no time. Deary me, to-day; but they will be in a way will the Harcourts, anyhow. Did you say these sleeves were to be stitched, Miss Smart?"

"No, ma'am; run and felled, if you please; and then just give them a tack at the top ready for the fringe. I thought I'd ought to had the mourning to make, ma'am, considering their cook's second cousin to my own aunt; however, I hear as Mrs. Perkes, the milliner in the Abbey Road, you know, ma'am, has got it. Not that I feel personal to Mrs. Perkes — I'm happy to say I don't indulge myself in them sort of feelings — but as I was saying to one of my apprentices only this morning, things *ought* to be considered. There'll be a fine lot to do, you may depend, ma'am. I shouldn't a bit wonder if Mrs. Harcourt went into crape tucks and a three-inch fall, and the young ladies into black silk, edged with puffings. She was always a woman that thought a wonderful great deal about her children, and she'll be sure to take on about it."

“ Well, Miss Smart, for my part I can’t think how professing people see it proper to make such a display in dress. I’ve had it on my mind once or twice to mention that I thought they were going a little too far. Besides, a clergyman like Mr. Harcourt, even if he hasn’t the charge of a parish, had ought to be a proper example. I never felt quite right about that flounced silk that Mrs. Harcourt wore last summer: I dare say you’ll remember it, Miss Smart, brown, with a white border, and made up with a velvet to match. I shouldn’t have minded wearing it myself, but for a person in her position, it was a little too much you know. But I’ve always said the Church people are not so exemplary in many respects as our congregation. And now, Miss Smart, about these sleeves, how must they be trimmed? Just hand me the fashions, Phebe.”

“ Puffs is very much worn, ma’am. I made up a moire antique for Mrs. Prentice last week,— a real beauty, with the sleeves all puffs every bit of way from the top to bottom, and the front to match. I think you’re rather partial to a little trimming, ma’am.”

“ Well, yes, Miss Smart, I can’t say but what I like things to look nice; and I always think a silk

dress, especially, ought to have a proper amount of trimming. I'll just give a look through the fashion-book though, for it's as well to keep up with the times. Capes seem to be stirring a good deal, and plain waists with a berthe. I think I'll have a berthe, Miss Smart, with a nice handsome fringe,—or, let me see, here's a dress here with braces."

"The only thing is, ma'am, a berthe is apt to make any one look *rather* broad in the back. Now you know braces——"

Mrs. Sharrup rose and surveyed her figure in the chimney-glass with a meditative air. Certainly there was no need for her wilfully to adopt any style of costume which had a tendency to make her look "rather broad in the back;" for nature, or possibly forty-five years of ample, wholesome diet, had slightly overstepped the bounds of generosity, and dowered her with breadth of shoulder sufficient for the burden of Atlas himself, had it been needful for her to carry it. She looked perplexed.

"Now, ma'am, if you would just allow me to show you the effect of these braces," and Miss Smart produced from her black bag a couple of lengths of tissue paper, which she crossed over

Mrs. Sharrup's portly bust and capacious back, and pinned them in proper position.

"Now, ma'am, these braces,—and I assure you they're quite new; I only got the pattern down from London last week—these braces, ma'am, with a crossway binding of velvet and a good fringe, would be just the very thing for you."

"I fancy I'm not *quite* so thin as I used to be," said Mrs. Sharrup, giving a second look into the chimney-glass, and then glancing across to an oil painting of a young lady in a white dress, seated on a bank of roses, understood to be a faithful representation of herself, as she appeared when some dozen years ago or more she won the heart and hand of Mr. Fentiman Sharrup. "Perhaps ~~the~~ braces *would* be best, Miss Smart; yes, we'll say the braces, with plenty of trimming,—I hate to see a good silk dress pinched for trimming. Julia, go see if Barbara has begun the pudding yet; I told her to get it in by eleven o'clock, but ten to one if she remembers. Have you heard yet how the mourning's to be made, Miss Smart?"

"Why, ma'am, of course I don't have no personal intercourse with Mrs. Perkes; but when I knew she'd got the work, I sent one of my young people round to her for a dozen of fancy buttons,

and told her to keep a sharp look out. She's very clever, is one of my young people, at taking up patterns, saves me a deal of money in not having to buy for myself; she can carry a new sleeve or a body in her eye as correct as anything. And she told me they was very new-fangled, ma'am, very indeed; plain bodies without a bit of trimming, except a ruche of ribbon round the neck, and sleeves set in plain at the shoulder; and as near as she could guess a yard and a quarter round the bottom; a great width that, ma'am, for a sleeve, and just edged to match the waist with a bit of ruche,—just come from Paris, perhaps; but it wouldn't suit *my* customers, that sort of thing. But, I fancy they were making something deeper than that, ma'am; may be, as I said before, crape tucks and a three-inch fall, for my young woman said there was such lots of crape throwed about the room. They're in deep affliction is the Harcourts, ma'am, you may depend upon it."

"Possible. You haven't heard if she bears it properly, have you? I always say there's something wrong when people can't control their feelings. I always make a point of controlling *my* feelings properly. When our Rebecca was took, three years ago come next March, I viewed it as

a dispensation, and didn't let it rest on my mind. I went into black linsey edged with braid, and put it off as soon as the warm weather came on, not but what I loved her well enough. I'm thankful to say I always cultivated a proper affection for my children, but I hadn't a doubt she was took for the best, and Mr. Sharrup thought so too. I'm surprised Mrs. Harcourt doesn't manifest a more becoming spirit than to have such a quantity of crape ; it isn't consistent to take on so about a child seven years old. If I were on visiting terms with her I should tell her so ; but at any rate, I hope some one will be faithful enough to set her duty before her. Yes, Miss Smart, I've decided on braces, as they give the figure an elegant appearance, and I'll have them well trimmed. Julia, yon's some one ringing at the front door ; it'll be Miss Gabbatis come to give you your music lesson. How often I've told her to come through the shop to save Barbara the trouble of attending the bell, but I expect she's over proud ; and Julia, mind you look at the clock on the mantel-piece before you begin, and see that you get your proper time ; you only got a quarter of an hour and ten minutes last time by my gold watch, instead of the half."

“Yes, ma; but she said something about her head aching, and she gave me three quarters next time.”

“I don’t approve of irregularity, Julia. See that you get your proper lesson, whether her head aches or not; such fancies, and for a woman of her age,—it’s ridiculous. Now, child, make haste down with you, and let that fashion book alone, there’s nothing in it concerns you; and be off directly to Miss Gabbatis.”

Miss Julia pouted her lip, and still loitered over the pretty coloured plates, showing no symptom of expediting her movements, until Mrs. Sharrup sprung up with the intention of administering a box on the ear, which benevolent intention the young lady perceived, and made a hasty dash out of the room, just in time to escape maternal chastisement.

“Proud set of folks rather, aren’t they, these Harcourts?” said Mrs. Sharrup, taking up the thread of her discourse, and going on with the stitching of the side pieces. “Don’t seem to mix with other people much, and has stiff sort of notions.”

“So I’ve heard say, ma’am, and dresses extravagant too. Mrs. Harcourt buys the best of

everything, and the eldest miss always wears silk of an afternoon. You know, ma'am, one of my apprentices is cousin to the young man that pays his addresses to the cook at Braeton Lodge, so I get to know a few things about the family."

"Exactly so, Miss Smart. Now, shall I be setting the hooks and eyes on those fronts? Always wears silk of an afternoon! Well, some folks has such notions; rich, I suppose, Miss Smart?"

"Oh! ma'am, a nice little property; just a nice little property, nothing more, ma'am. You know he'd a uncle died that left him enough to live upright with, and there's nobody for it now the child's took, but the two young ladies; so that one may say they're tolerably well off. But you know, Mrs. Sharrup, some folks makes their things last so long, and puts them on to look nicer than other people. Now, the eldest miss has a black silk dress with flounces that she's had to my personal knowledge for these last four years, and I declare it don't look a touch worse than it did first time I saw her in it. And Mrs. Harcourt has a India shawl, a real beauty, ma'am, brown with a gold border, as was sent over by a brother she has in them parts, which she's wore ever since the style came up, which must be ten years back; so per-

haps you see, ma'am, they don't spend so much as folks might reckon."

"If they don't spend money, they spend time, which is equally objectionable," said Mrs. Sharup, in a severely dignified tone. "But I always said they was a family very much given to that sort of thing, although the folks at Braeton think such a wonderful deal about them, and tell such fine stories of their benevolence. But do you really think, Miss Smart, that velvet will do best for these braces, or would a bit of fancy ribbon answer better? I really can't get my mind at rest about it."

"Well, ma'am, you see," and Miss Smart held the half-finished articles at arm's length, and surveyed them with a thoughtful air; "velvet certainly has a very handsome look, and wears well too; but to my mind a fancy ribbon has a *youthful* appearance, and perhaps ——"

"Rachel, put your bonnet on, and just run round to Mr. Sweepers, and ask him to let you bring me over a few rolls of fancy ribbon, a good match, and plenty of colour mixed in. I'm fond of a little bit of colour, Miss Smart; and while you are there just give a look round the shop and see if they've got anything new in the way of

mantles. Yes, Miss Smart," she continued, returning to the subject, "the Harcourts are decidedly what I denominate stuck-up people; never come to tea-meetings nor bazaars, nor join in a quiet, harmless little bit of chat, like other people. I've had it on my tongue end to say it a long time, and it's the truth, as indeed I hope everything is that I say. And have you heard anything, Miss Smart, about this new agent that they've got to the Duke of Chartermayne's estate at Mossingay?"

"Why no, ma'am, I can't say I have; at least anything particular to speak of, you know. Folks say he keeps himself very much to himself, and doesn't mix with society in a proper manner."

"Handsome rather, isn't he?" remarked Miss Phebe, in a languid drawl.

"My dear, I beg you will not occupy your mind with such trifles. I think I have requested you several times not to make remarks on the personal appearance of members of the opposite sex, and to elevate your thoughts to a becoming level for a young person of your position. Has he a good salary, Miss Smart, and house provided?"

"Oh yes, ma'am; I can't say *exact*, you know;

but anyhow not under three hundred a year, and rent and taxes paid, quite plenty you know for a young man to settle upon as times goes now. And then, ma'am, he can double it if he isn't foolishly particular about little matters; the last agent made many a pretty little picking that nobody was any worse for. But I *have* heard tell, ma'am, that this new Mr. Roden stands very stiff upright in them sort of things, and won't take nothing as isn't stipulated for in the Duke's agreement."

"Such nonsense, he'll find it won't do. Mr. Sharrup always charges double to the nobility, and it's my opinion they had ought to pay. I don't see myself where's the use of having a duke in the neighbourhood, if he isn't to be made properly useful."

"Exactly so, ma'am, just what I always says myself, and I hope some one will put Mr. Roden up to it; for if he hasn't been accustomed to be a agent, of course he can't be expected to act proper. And as for his being handsome, ma'am, if you will excuse my mentioning such a subject, I can assure you he's as plain a person as eyes was ever set on; and I hear tell from Miss Farbelook,—that's a lady, ma'am, that I work for at Braeton,—because she

prefers her things, and very properly too, made by a town dressmaker, — that he hasn't a bit of polish about him, and never goes to parties, nor takes young ladies to flower shows, nor brings bouquets from the Duke's greenhouses for them when there's going to be a ball, nor makes himself acceptable in a general way, nor pays genteel compliments, nor does anything that's proper for a young gentleman. Why, young, he isn't that exactly, for, if folks says true, he's a long way on to forty; but it's my opinion as long as a person isn't settled with a wife, it's his duty to make himself agreeable."

"Of course," said Miss Phebe, "and he's a barbarian if he doesn't do it. Then, I should like to know how he employs his time."

"Why, miss, that's more than I can tell. I've heard say that he takes a very great interest in the estate, and is trying to bring in a new system of farming, and is much more active than the agents have ever been before. Not that it's anything in his favour, to my mind; for when the rents has got took, and proper repairs made, I don't see myself what more a agent has to do."

"Personal views," said Mrs. Sharrup, who was a conscientious disbeliever in anything like un-

selfishness, “personal views, Miss Smart. It won’t answer, take my word for it, it won’t. Let him do his duty, that’s quite enough. I never do any more, and I never mean to.”

“And then, ma’am, they say he’s very fond of planning and surveying, and that sort of thing; and I’ve heard he paints.”

“Paints; oh! indeed. Ah! yes; and now I come to think about it, I *did* notice how very nice and new the front door^d looked last time we went past.”

“Oh! no, ma’am, not that sort; but pictures, you know, of trees and such like; and then, ma’am, folks does say,—but of course you know I should not wish it mentioned again as coming from me—folks does say that he goes often of an evening and reads to them poor old men and women who live in the cottages by the green.”

“Very unmanly, Miss Smart, very unmanly indeed; if Mr. Sharrup did so I should tell him of it at once. It won’t do, Miss Smart, take my word for it, it won’t; such things as these ought to be looked into. Mr. Roden will never be popular in this neighbourhood; and if I’m not very much mistaken he’ll find the agency don’t suit him.”

“ Yes, ma’am, them’s pretty much my opinions, though of course I can’t go for to say them with such ability as yourself. Did you say dinner, ma’am? Thank you, it doesn’t matter where I sit,” and Miss Smart shook the thread ends out of her dress, weeded off a few of the pins and needles that bristled in front of her waist, gave her hair a smooth down and her bead collar a pull up, and then took her seat at the table, while Julia went to fetch her Pa in out of the shop.

“ Mr. Sharrup,” said his wife, when that worthy individual had nearly finished his second slice of mutton with caper sauce, and might therefore be presumed to be in a favourable state for receiving the intelligence, “ have you heard that the Harcourts of Braeton have lost that little boy of theirs? He went off with the croup night before last in an hour or two.”

“ Harcourts? Braeton?—dear me, that reminds me there was an order came in from Miss Farbe-look this morning for half a dozen pounds of sugar, and another canister of my patent Marbrook biscuits. Richard, Richard!” and Mr. Sharrup laid down his knife and fork, and drew aside the little green curtain of the door that opened into the shop, “ you see that that order

is sent off to Miss Farbelook's punctual this afternoon."

"My dear," said Mrs. Sharrup with a perceptible accession of dignity from behind the tureen of mashed potatoes.

"My dear," echoed her partner from behind the leg of mutton.

"Did you understand me, Mr. Sharrup, when I informed you that the Harcourts of Braeton had lost that little boy of theirs? I do wish, my dear, you were not so absorbed in business as to forget the customary sympathies of humanity."

"Beg pardon, my dear, but a shop *is* a shop, and an order *is* an order; but who did you say was dead?"

"Mr. Harcourt's little boy."

"Dead, *dead!*" and Mr. Sharrup pushed his plate away, and looked as sympathetic as the peculiarly unelastic organisation of his facial muscles would permit; "what, you don't say little Walter Harcourt is dead, that nice little fellow with the brown eyes and curly hair, him that used to come in to my shop for prunes and figs on his way to the grammar school, always paid ready money, too, and never any excuses, and how old did you say?"

"Six years." Mrs. Sharrup was severely laconic now.

"Ha! six years old, near the age of our Nettie. And how did you say he was took off?"

"Croup."

"Croup, ah! and near the age of our Nettie. Might have been her that was took instead. Come here, Nettie, and give your pa a kiss."

Nettie, who looked quite blooming in a fresh pinafore, and hair tied with blue ribbons, descended from her high chair, and clambered up to the paternal knee to receive the offered salute. Dinner was over, and she was about to return to the dressing of her doll in the corner behind the rocking-chair, but she opened her great blue eyes in astonishment when her undemonstrative pa, instead of putting her down at once as usual, kept his arm round her and held her where she was; nay, so far relaxed from his usual reserve as to allow her to pull his silver watch out of its pocket, and held it to her ear to catch the ticking; and even, when her spirit of curiosity was roused, to open the spring and feast her admiring eyes on its complex internal machinery.

Mr. Sharrup did not take his customary *siesta* that afternoon, but sat rocking the delighted

Nettie on his knee, until spying the head of a customer through the curtained loop-hole in the shop door, he gave her another kiss, set her gently down, and went back again to his counter, saying to himself as he went —

“Only six years old, about the age of our little Nettie. Dear me, and it might have been her that was took.”

CHAPTER I.

Braeton, Feb. 14th. — Here am I, Mabel Harcourt, sitting in my own little room upstairs; a regular snow scene outside the window, and within, a blazing fire, a commodious easy chair, plenty of books, and everything else that is needed to make one's bodily nature comfortable in this stupid English climate. As to the *other* nature, I have lived long enough now to know that it needs more, much more than books, fires, or easy chairs, to keep it from grumbling.

I was turning over my wardrobe drawer this morning to look for an old woollen shawl that mamma had promised to Lizzie Machin, and amongst sundry other reminiscences of my childish days which repose there, I happened to light upon a little old red morocco-covered pocket-book which Aunt Miriam gave me when I was

only ten years old. So, after I had found the shawl and taken it down stairs, I began to investigate this memento of my juvenile life. First of all came my name, written in great sprawling round-hand letters, and then a very circumstantial diary of current household events, commencing with the advent of four kittens, and the breaking of my new battledore in consequence of leaving it out one night on the grass-plot. Then follows an account of my first music lesson, given me by Miss Gabbatis, with a minute description of the way she had her hair done, and her dress, which was a brown alpaca with stripes round the skirt. After that comes the record of a juvenile tea-party which we had on Maud's birth-day when she was five years old, telling how many pieces of cake Miss Ducie ate, and how Maud got her frock gathers torn out, and cried nearly all night in the orchard about it. It goes on very regularly for about a month, and then comes to a stop, and there is never another entry until nearly four years later, when I find this one in a school-girl sort of hand:—

“I had a little brother born yesterday morning. He is to be called Walter, and we are all very glad.”

After that there is nothing more at all in the book. And as I was reading it over, there seemed to come back upon me once more all the freshness and child feeling of those early days. I could recall the time so exactly, and all that belonged to it — how papa and mamma used to look before their hair got so grey as it is now ; Aunt Miriam's kind, quiet voice, and the beautiful tunes she used to play to us at night in the nursery. Maud's sweet baby ways, her cooing voice and winning smile — the same even now, my sister, when everything else is changed ; then little Walter's merry step and boyish laugh, his brave, bold, changeful countenance, his quick, impetuous freaks of temper, all came back upon me ; and how in this very room, which used to be our play-room then, where I sit now thoughtful and with a grown-up womanly feeling upon me, we all danced and laughed and played together, as we shall never, never do again.

And it seemed to me as I thought about it all that I would like to have some record of these days too, as they pass on so quietly, so monotonously. Not a diary of set phrases — I don't like diaries — but just a pen and ink photograph from time to time of passing thoughts and feelings, that in

years to come, when I get to be an old woman with spectacles and grey hair, when the quick, upspringing freshness of life has passed away from me, and the present and future alike toned down into the quiet, uniform, neutral tint of age, I may in lonely winter evenings draw my chair up to the fire, and open my desk, and study with some such charm as still hangs about my ten year old diary, this later story of my grown-up woman life.

And I begin it now, as I have nothing else to do to-night. Nothing to do! I think it must be very pleasant to find one's work in the world; but I haven't found mine yet, and sometimes I think I never shall. How often I envy Sir Everard Albyn's labourers as they go stumping past the sunk fence at the bottom of our garden on a Friday afternoon, with honest earned wages in their dirty pockets, wages that will keep themselves, their house, and wife and children decent all the week. As for me, I never did any good to anybody in my life, and I suppose now I never shall. A pretty confession to make, but it's the truth; and there's a sort of proud satisfaction in speaking the truth, howsoever bad it happens to be.

Everything is so white and still to-day! How pretty Braeton always looks in snow time! That long row of birch-trees down the orchard, how lightly the flakes lie on their delicate branches; and our acacia, papa's pet tree, looks as if some one had thrown over it a dazzling bridal veil. The fields that lie beyond the Marbrook Road, too, and that long reach of waste land between here and Susan Wright's cottage, are one fair, pure, unbroken lake of white — just like Maud, just like my sister Maud, so pure, so calm, so unruffled. Next week at this time, when the thaw has come and the smuts have blown over from the Marbook chimneys, and they are half covered with pools, and slush, and mud, they will be rather more a type of my own character, I fancy.

This is Valentine day. Nobody ever sent me a Valentine. If anybody did, and I knew who it was, I would throw it in his face again,—yes, I'm sure I would; Maud didn't get one either. One would as soon think of taking hold of a white lily with dirty hands, as of sending our Maud one of those common things. We did get two brought to the house, though; one for Morley and another for Joan. Servants always get Valentines, I don't know how it is. Poor Joan, I knew she expected one, she

watched so for the postman, and looked so disconsolate when nine o'clock went by and he didn't come;—silly girl, she might have been sure he would be an hour late such a day as this, let alone the snow. I was crossing the hall when he rung the bell. She bolted out of the kitchen, and nearly knocked me down in her haste to get to the door first; then she darted off into the laundry full speed with her prizes, and I could hear them both for an hour afterwards, bursting out with spasmodic fits of laughter and stifled exclamations. Poor girls, well I'm glad they got one, for servants haven't many pleasures, and I feel sorry for them when they are disappointed, though goodness knows I've been disappointed times enough myself, and no one has been sorry for *me*. Well, well, I won't complain.

Yonder is Maud coming up the garden walk. What tiny little footsteps she leaves behind her in the snow! She has been to see Susan Wright and old Lizzy Machin, I can tell that by her satchel with the Testament peeping out of one corner. Dear little Maud, she has done more good in her seventeen years than I in my five-and-twenty; no wonder everybody loves her, — no wonder people say when they meet her, "What a

sweet looking girl !” “Sweet looking,”—no one ever called *me* “sweet looking ;” I should rather fancy not. And yet, I remember, before little Walter died, four years ago, she was as wayward and unquiet as I am now ; only, instead of bursting out with a storm of words and screams if anything vexed her, she would steal away to the old seat under the apple-tree in the orchard by herself, and cry there. Only four years ago. I don’t think her eyes know the feel of tears now, they seem so infinitely full of peace and content. I once asked her how it was that she had changed so, and what had made her so happy,—so very happy. She did not say anything then, but next day was my birthday, and when I went into my room after breakfast, there was a little prayer-book on the table for me, with this text written in it : “ *Then are they glad because they be quiet ; so He bringeth them to the haven where they would be.*”

Maud has got to that haven before me.

Yes, my sister Maud is very sweet-looking. As I said before, no one ever called *me* sweet-looking ; if they did, I wonder if I should like it,—perhaps not. And yet I should like somebody to love me. Papa is very proud of me because I am so clever, and so are mamma and my sister ;

but I want more than that, although it may be my own fault that I don't get it. I remember a very long time ago—down puss this minute, off my easy chair; when shall I succeed in convincing you that that green chintz cover was not put clean on only last week for your sole and special accommodation? If I believed in the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, I should say that cat had once been an Epicurean philosopher, for never was any two-legged creature more bent on self-indulgence than she is! I remember, a very long time ago, when I wasn't more than twelve years old, I used to do problems in class with those two boys of Sir Everard Albyn's, who came to papa to learn astronomy, and I always stood first, though they were old enough to go to college. Then Mr. Heath, our drawing master, told mamma I painted so well that he couldn't distinguish my water-colour drawings from his own copies, and Signor Bando, from Marbrook, said he couldn't take me any farther in music. I'm not praising myself—no, goodness knows I am not vain anyhow, whatever else I may be, but I'm just considering the state of the case, because, as the philosophers say, "knowledge is power," and I want to know why my knowledge doesn't give me the

power of being decently happy. As for languages, Algebra, Natural History, and those sorts of things, I can see as far into them as any of the masters in the Marbrook grammar school, which perhaps is not saying very much after all. I ought then to be good enough society for myself without wanting anybody else to lean upon, and yet—and yet——

I have it now, I know what it is. I want *something to do*. And the reason that ordinary people are so much happier than I am, is, that they can lose themselves, mind, body, and all, in common working life, not seeking for anything beyond it, not wearying themselves with things never intended for them to know. Why can't I cook, and bake, and brew, and be contented like bustling Mrs. Sharrup, of Ceylon House? why can't Mabel Harcourt come down from her perch and take a tract district, like any other young lady? why can't she put her pride in her pocket, and be of some use in the world? Try Mabel, try.

But what is there to be done? what can a girl or a woman do, hampered and tied down as she is by custom and conventionality? Oh, how impatient it makes me! Maud, my sister Maud,

sitting by this time so quietly in the dining-room, just below me, knitting stockings for poor old Machin, or writing out a child's story for your class at the school next Sunday, or perhaps dreaming over the sweet bright thoughts of "Aurora Leigh,"—do *you* ever feel like this; do you ever weary for work, for something to do; does your spirit ever chafe on the dull, dull road of week-day life; do you ever drag at those conventional ropes and traces which fasten us to the car of gentility, and force us to go, body, soul, and spirit, in the old worn ruts of custom? Do you ever feel that longing for something above and beyond what we have here; is your clear blue sky of thought ever flecked over with clouds like these that I see from my window, careering over Lingold Wood, black, and dim, and dreary? Maud, Maud, I would I were at peace, even as you are.

But I *will* do something, I will, I will. If I were a man—I often wish I was, for then I could get leave to work:—if I were a man, I would be a writer, or a clergyman, or a poet, or something in which I could get sway over the hearts of others, and hold a sceptre in the world of mind. Or I would be a traveller, and study the aspects of

Nature. I would go into those great steppes and llanos and pampas of South America, which Humboldt chants of in his grand books; or wander into the dreary forests of the far West, with their gorgeous tinting and calm unbroken silence. Or, no, better than all these, I would be an orator, and thousands of people should listen to my words, and with golden-tongued eloquence I would move their surging passions, and win for myself a great name side by side with our country's heroes. But being, as the phrase goes, "a young lady of good position and genteel family connections," why all these grand aspirations must go to the four winds, and I must walk elegantly through life with a piece of embroidery work in my hand, and a tutored smile upon my face, just like those young ladies I meet sometimes at the Marbrook parties, pretty interesting combinations of roses and white muslin. And can I make nothing better of my life than this? Anyhow I'll try.

Now, why can't I be like Maud? She has the same materials as I have, the same home, the same household belongings, the same surroundings, the same village, with its nests of ignorant little children and helpless old women, the same talents and activities; nay, of talent I have more

than she has, for we always thought Maud dull when she was a little girl. And yet, whilst I am whining and whimpering here, like a spoiled child, about having nothing to do, she is filling up every day as it passes with deeds of kindness and thoughtful love, which make all hearts bless her.

How different are the curtseys I get from the village children to those they give *her*; how different the cold greetings from the poor women when I go into their cottages (which certainly is not often the case), to the tearful gladness with which I have often seen them welcome Maud!

But some people seem cut out for visiting the sick and poor. I don't think I am. I never get on smoothly with them, somehow or other. I always feel inclined to give those stupid untidy wives a good healthy scolding for once in a while, or to drag the old rheumatic women out into the sunshine for a walk, instead of listening so patiently as Maud does to their grumblings; and to get out of the way of those dirty little children, with their greasy pinafores, and stubby hair, and smeared faces, instead of looking kindly at them like her, and asking them to come to school, and inquiring about their mothers and so forth. So I

think from this distaste to it, I may legitimately infer that district-visiting, or a sort of amateur curacy, is not the department of feminine benevolence in which I am destined to shine. Let me look out for something else then, still keeping Maud and her ways in view.

Domestic duties strike me next. Perhaps they ought to have struck me first. I have often heard Maud say that there is nothing like a judicious mixture of household work for making one enjoy elegant leisure or intellectual pursuits; and that she can always study with a freer mind, or write her papers for the school more easily, after a morning's spell at domestic avocations. It may be so, but I can't say I have had the same sort of experience myself. Indeed, if there is one thing I detest more than another, it is having to help Morley when she is busy, or to dust the fancy things in the drawing-room, or to have an hour's campaign in the kitchen on baking morning. As for folding and ironing, or mending linen, or assisting to put things in a forward state at cleaning time, why, I'd as soon shut up house and go into lodgings. Then, for what is denominated plain work, meaning thereby the manufacturing of webs of linen and calico into articles of wearing apparel, I hide my

diminished head in shame to think how often, when mamma has given me a pair of wristbands to stitch, I have gone into a fit of ill-temper, and sighed violently for a sewing machine.

I watch Maud sometimes as she sits at the dining room window, patiently darning those beautiful old tablecloths of ours, which have been in the family so long, flashing the needle in and out, and through and through, with her white taper fingers; and I have wondered at the look of quiet contentment which rests upon her face, and the cool cheerful composure with which she accomplishes the task, when, if I had been in her place, I should have pulled and dragged the unfortunate fabric out of all mathematical proportions, and ended at last by giving it a desperate thrust into the nearest cupboard. Maud says she likes plain work because she can think and reflect over it. Ah, it is all very well for quiet hearts to think and reflect, but, for unquiet ones, what are they to do? I like something that carries my thoughts on with it, and takes me out of myself and gives me something to think about. As for teaching children in the Sunday school, or gathering up older girls for an evening class, that is out of my way altogether.

On your own showing, then, Mabel Harcourt,

you're a useless sort of individual, good for nothing much, but to talk science with your papa, and to cut a stylish figure at an evening party among people you despise, and who cannot understand you. When you come to die, you will have to look back upon a life spent in ——. Well, well, never mind. I won't think any more about it just now; if there is any thing in me, and I hope there is, after all, it will find its way out somehow or other, and if not, I must be content, that's all. There is mamma calling me to her in the still-room, to stir some jelly, I suppose, for some old woman. I heard her saying there was something of the kind to make. I can't think why people persist in growing old, and having the rheumatism, and being ill, and giving other people the trouble of making jelly for them. Catch *me* ever doing so.

Yes, mamma, I'm coming directly.

CHAPTER II.

MISS GABBATIS had something on her mind. That was quite evident as she trotted down the Marbrook Road to Ceylon House to give Miss Julia Sharrup her music lesson. The faithful old green silk umbrella that had companied all her wanderings for the last twenty years, would have wondered, had it been endowed with the capability of wondering, at the marvellous freaks which the little maiden lady played with its respectable carved stick and ivory handle. Sometimes she shouldered it military fashion, anon she used it after the manner of a backboard, and then endeavoured to balance it on her forefinger in the air, as she had seen the conjurors do with their wands when she was coming home from Betty Haye's the night before. Her Dunstable bonnet, too, was more awry than usual; the brown ribbon bow, which from time

immemorial had been accustomed to hang in strict perpendicular over the middle point of her shawl behind, twisted violently round to one side, and the shawl itself presented an unusual combination of flying irregular lines, being put on that morning in a fashion peculiar to its owner, and only adopted in cases like the present, when Miss G. had something on her mind. And there was a general air of unsettlement about her ways, and a great manifestation of something quite the opposite of self-possession, insomuch that when she arrived at the drawing-room of Ceylon House and seated herself on the customary chair at the right-hand corner of the square piano, Miss Julia honoured her with a very lengthened stare, and then turned round to her sister who sat doing fancy work on the sofa, and said in an audible whisper, "She's wrong-side out this afternoon, anyhow."

Perhaps Miss Gabbatis overheard the elegant observation, and then again perhaps she did not; but, however that might be, she was sublimely indifferent on this occasion to all mundane annoyances. For there had sprung up in her maidenly bosom, that very morning, a pure well-spring of enjoyment whereof we shall hear by and by, and

whose like the good-tempered little lady had not known for many a long year. It was this latent sense of coming joy which had moved her to play such freaks with her green silk umbrella, and this also which enabled her patiently to beat time with her old silver pencil-case upon the cracked and jingling piano, and to listen with calm countenance and heroic fortitude to the excruciating performances of her promising pupil.

Could any one have looked into the little maiden lady's thoughts as she gave Miss Julia Sharrup her music lesson, and coupled them with the words which she uttered, some such combination as this might have been the result:—

“Miss Julia, we'll have the scales and exercises first (astonishing thing, when I hadn't heard from my aunt for such a time); now sit firmly on the music stool, and keep your elbows close to your side, and your wrists well up (but I suppose I must wait a twelvemonth before matters get settled); pay attention to your counting, if you please; one and, two and, three and, a little louder, if you please (Betty Haye shall have a mutton chop every Sunday, now that I can afford it); a mistake there, Miss Julia, you don't count three to a codicil,—I mean to a crotchet (and I'll have

a new French merino dress against Easter); you're playing a wrong note in the bass too, first space A, second space C, third space, what?—E of course, now try and remember (and I'll buy the cottage I live in too, and have a bay window put out in front) that's a wrong finger, Miss Julia, you give me more trouble with your fingering than all the rest of my pupils put together (and new curtains for the best parlour); another wrong note in the bass. If you will not pay more attention I shall have to speak to your mamma."

"You may speak then," was the gentle Julia's sweet reply.

"Ma says I ain't going to learn from you no longer than this quarter, you don't bring me on fast enough."

Miss Gabbatis vouchsafed no reply to this gracious speech, and the lesson proceeded with sundry breaks and interruptions to its close. When it was over, and she had tied on her bonnet ready to go away, Miss Julia politely attended her to the door, and dismissed her with this amiable benediction:—

"Good-bye, old woman; it only wants six weeks to Easter, and then we shall be done with you."

But, as we remarked before, Miss Gabbatis was

happily proof against insult. She proceeded quietly down the street, and when she came to the secluded country road which led to Braeton, she recommenced her freaks with the umbrella, continuing them until she arrived at the row of stately beech-trees which marked the Lodge garden; and here she stopped, for Mrs. Harcourt had invited her to tea this afternoon.

Maud and Mabel had both been the pupils of Miss Gabbatis in their early days, and still retained a grateful remembrance of the skill and patience which she had once evinced in teaching their ideas to shoot in a musical direction. Moreover, by long acquaintance with the two girls, Miss Gabbatis had come to feel an almost maternal interest in their ways and doings, and always made a point of hunting down most vigorously any flying piece of scandal which the gossip-mongers of the village were ready enough to get together for the disparagement of those who did not belong to their own petty clique.

“Why, Miss Gabbatis,” said Mabel, “you’re all in a flutter, is anything amiss? I hope nothing has happened to the kittens and their mamma.”

“Oh no, thank you, Miss Mabel, I’m glad to

say they're doing very well indeed. I gave Mrs. Puss a saucer of new milk, and wrapped the family up in a nice drawer of hay before I left home, but you must know an event has occurred this morning which put me into quite a pleasing state of trepidation. The fact is," and here Miss G. turned to her hostess, "I received a communication this morning, Mrs. Probate, or rather Mrs. Harcourt, which has greatly disturbed the codicil of my thoughts."

"The *what*?" said Maud.

"The current of my thoughts, my dear; didn't I say so? To tell you the truth, Mrs. Harcourt, I've had a legacy." And having got the important news fairly off her mind, Miss Gabbatis looked about for a place to set down her umbrella.

"Dear me, how delightful!" said Mabel, who was seated at the table, copying Ary Scheffer's beautiful painting of Dante and Beatrice, "how I wish I could say the same. But do take off your bonnet now, and tell us all about it."

Miss Gabbatis began to disrobe. She divested herself of her shawl first, wrapping it up carefully, and sticking the black-headed pin, wherewith it had been fastened, into one corner; next she took off her bonnet and rolled the strings carefully up;

then deposited her net cap, gloves, neckhandkerchief neatly within the crown, and formed the whole into a compact pile, which was carried by Joan into the spare bedroom, until such time as she should require it again. She next proceeded to take out one of her side combs, and with it make a slight rearrangement of the three short grey curls which flourished on each side of her face; after which beautification her toilet was complete, and she sat down in the rocking chair, put her feet on the fender, and took a piece of netting work out of her pocket.

“Now, then, for the legacy,” said Mabel.

“Well, then, you know, my little maid Patty has gone out for a holiday, so I have the house all to myself, with the exception of puss.”

“Exactly so; but I don’t see what that has to do with the legacy.”

“You will though, if you have patience; only, Miss Mabel, you know you always were in such a hurry to get to the bottom of everything. Well, as I was telling you, Patty is out, and I have the house all to myself, and being alone and not having anybody to set an example to, I don’t make a point of getting up quite so early as I might do. My father never got up in a morning in winter

time until he could see to shave, and I do the same."

"And pray, Miss Gabbatis, how long has the sun risen in a general way before you can see to perform that operation?"

"Oh, Miss Mabel, you do take things so literally. You know I mean I never get up in a morning, when I am alone, until I can see to part my hair straight down the middle without a candle."

"That is a distinction with a difference; and now for the legacy."

"Yes, I'm coming to it directly. Well, you know it was very cold this morning, and I didn't feel very hungry, as I'm no great eater at any time, and I had had a very good basin of gruel last night, so I thought it was no use getting up, specially as there was no one to set an example to, and I was sure the door-bell wouldn't ring until ten o'clock when the milkman came. So I lay very still and comfortable, thinking what I should have for dinner."

"And what did you fix upon, Miss Gabbatis?" said Mabel, still adding touch after touch to the upturned face of Beatrice.

"Well, I was undecided for some time between

a mutton chop and a threepenny pie from the cook-shop, but at last I fixed on the pie as being less trouble, and as I always feel great confidence about Mr. Tressle's pies and their antecedents. Well, then, I cast about for what sort of a pudding I should have, and I had very nearly made up my mind to a little Brown and Polson custard, for I think it is so delicious, and made with so little trouble, when there came a great knock at the front door. Wasn't it shocking now, and nobody in the house but me!"

"It was, indeed, Miss Gabbatis, a deeply trying circumstance; but I don't see what it has to do with the legacy."

"A great deal, Miss Mabel, a very great deal, only you'll have patience. You were just the same when you were a little girl, never would play anything but presto and allegro pieces. Well, as I was going to tell you, I jumped up in a crack when I heard the knock, and doubled the counterpane round me, and popped on an old bonnet over my cap, and put my head out of the window, and said, 'Who's there?'

"'It's me, ma'am,' a great rough voice said, 'I'm the postman; be quick, if you please, for I've brought you a letter.'

“‘Oh, very well,’ I said, ‘I’m not in a position to take it just now, but if you’ll slip it under the door I’ll fetch it by and by.’ Well, then, I lay down again, for you know it was very cold, and began to think whoever it could have been who had sent me a letter. I knew it wasn’t from my dear brother at Cambridge, for I had written to him only the week before, and he never answers my letters under a month; and it couldn’t be from my old godmother, either, for she never writes to me but once a year — on the anniversary of my christening day, and that is on the 12th of September, just before apple gathering. Well, then, it occurred to me that it might be from some one who was wanting a kitten; I never have any difficulty in disposing of my kittens, Miss Mabel, as their mamma is very pretty, and has a good reputation for mousing; but then they’re very young yet, and not capable of being placed out in situations where they cannot have the benefit of maternal supervision, so it was hardly likely I should be having applications for them. Well, then, at last I thought the best way of finding out who it was from, as I have no other regular correspondents besides those I have mentioned, would be to fetch it upstairs and open it.”

“Just what I should have done in a similar case, Miss Gabbatis; but we haven’t come to this legacy.”

“Yes, I’m just at it now; I am, indeed. Well, I put on a few things, and crept down to the front door — terrible cold work though — and brought it up, and then I held it close to the window blind and read it. And what do you think it said? Why, it was a letter from a lawyer in Manchester, to tell me that an old aunt of mine had died and left me fifteen hundred pounds.”

“Oh, Miss Gabbatis! but it’s no wonder you’re in a state of pleasing trepidation. But what did you do?”

“Well, I read it over a few times till I had got it off by heart, to be quite sure it was true, and then I popped into bed again to meditate upon it.”

“A pleasant subject, and I doubt not your meditations thereupon would be sweet unto you.”

“Yes, my dear, I can’t say but what they were — very pleasant indeed; and so very absorbing that the milkman came and rang the bell and went away again without my ever hearing him, so I got no milk taken, and had to go and borrow a saucerful of Milly Dakin, the blacksmith’s wife, before

the family could be supplied with breakfast. I mean to send five pounds to our rector, to be distributed among the poor people of the parish at Easter, and I shall buy Betty Hays a stuff frock. As to anything else, I'm not decided yet what to do."

"Well, I suppose you will in the first place give up teaching music, and live upright on your means, as they say in the country we come from."

"Dear me, Mrs. Harcourt, what a funny expression! Well, I hope, whether I have means or not, I shall always live upright; but I certainly had thought of buying the cottage I rent now, and having new chintz curtains and a bay window put up; a nice coloury pattern, you know, a peacock on a green ground, or something of that sort; and I had turned it over in my own mind, too, to buy that little patch of ground behind, and grow a few turnips on my own account; you know I am so fond of a few turnips with boiled mutton."

"Miss Gabbatis a landed proprietor,—why, you will be wanting an agent next to manage your estate."

"Just what I was thinking, Miss Mabel, so as soon as I was dressed and had got my pie bought, I slipped down to see Mr. Roden, at Mossingay,

and ask his advice; and he has very kindly promised to look after the property for me, and put me into a way of investing my legacy when I get it. He's a kind man, that Mr. Roden, a very kind man. I'm sure he was as pleased when I told him of my good fortune as if he'd been my own son, and heir to it himself."

"Yes, I like Mr. Roden very much," said Mabel, who had nearly finished the face of Beatrice, and was putting a few delicate touches on the cheek. "I like him very much indeed, for all he's rough and straightforward, as people say, and not over polished. Maud, you really shouldn't sit so near the fire, it catches your complexion so. To me there is something in the very ruggedness of his nature that I can't help liking, it makes such a fine background for his kindness and gentleness. Do you know he always reminds me of some far away Scottish mountain, that is clothed with black pine woods, and cut through by craggy water-courses, and yet in the sunshiny places beautiful little harebells grow, and soft springing mosses."

"Dear me, Miss Mabel, what a way you have of putting things. Now you know I never thought of Mr. Roden in that light, but they do say he transacts the duke's business better than any

agent that has ever come to Mossingay yet. And as for his being a Scotch mountain clothed with pine-tree woods, and cut in pieces by water-courses, I think that brown overcoat that he wears with the velvet collar and large buttons, is very much more tasty and becoming for a gentleman in his position. You know I can't bear extravagances in dress; and really, to tell you the truth, Miss Mabel, I do think the costume you mentioned would have rather a strange effect."

Mabel only smiled, and went on touching up the face of Beatrice.

"But, my dear," Miss Gabbatis continued, "dress is of very little consequence; it's the inward man, you know, that one looks at. That is my maxim, and I act upon it, as you may judge from the fact that I haven't had my brown alpaca dress altered since it was made six years ago for me to have my portrait taken for my dear brother at the University. And from what I can make out about Mr. Roden, he seems to be both a gentleman and a Christian; which is as much as ought to be expected from any man in the present dispensation, and so it does not greatly signify what tailor he employs. But if you'll excuse me saying it, Miss Mabel, you do puzzle me some-

times with your opinions of human nature in a general way. I suppose it's with being *gifted*, that makes you express yourself out of the common order. I hope we understand each other about Mr. Roden, though, — that he's a man quite to be trusted; and I shall feel perfect confidence in leaving my legacy, when I get it, in his management."

CHAPTER III.

STEPHEN RODEN had finished his day's work for the Duke of Chartermayne, and as it was too dark to go on with his sketch of Lingold Wood, which stood on the easel by the window, and yet too light to ring for the lamp and set about his plan of the Mossingay estate, he was sitting in the great leather-covered easy chair by his office fire, thinking — building castles in the air perhaps — as he watched the flames curl and leap and reflect themselves in a rosy glow from the quaintly carved, old-fashioned fireplace.

A comfortable fire-place that in the Mossingay office. Not one of your modern sham registers, fashionable reader, an offshoot of these deceptive times — somewhat like an inverted panshon, with a couple of bars fixed in across the lower part, and the chimney so scientifically boxed in, for

fear of smoke, that it gives you the heart-ache to think how the little sweep boy will have to squeeze and crush into it when cleaning time comes, — but a nice, honest, respectable fire-place, such as old-fashioned people loved to have in their rooms for comfort and convenience, and must now be looked for among the *débris* and cast-off rubbish of some whitesmith's back yard, whither the rage for modern improvement has banished it; elaborately adorned with a running pattern up the sides, and marvellous twists and flutings and borders wherever such decorations could be placed. A convenient receptacle for coals behind, too, to save you the trouble of ringing the bell, or rising from your seat whenever the fire needed mending; and, to crown all, two brightly-polished and expansive hobs — utterly ignored in the modern system — most handy to set a kettle on, or a jug of linseed if you happened to have a cold, or perhaps oftener still, if you belong to the lordly sex, to rest your feet upon in charming idleness, when slipper time came and the day's work was done.

Just as Stephen Roden was using them now, as he sat leaning back in his great arm-chair with his hands clasped behind his head, his maps and plans comfortably located in the office drawer, and

nothing left for him to do but think. What is he thinking of, then? To find that out we must leave his present position for a while, and travel some time back.

Stephen Roden had been agent to the Duke of Chartermayne for about five years, long enough for him and the Braeton people to have got tolerably acquainted with each other, as indeed they had done some time ago, to the satisfaction of both parties.

Mabel had not been so very far wrong when she likened Mr. Roden to one of his native Scottish mountains, albeit Miss Gabbatis did not appreciate the force of the simile. For he was a broad, thorough, strong-hearted man; somewhat roughly chiselled it might be, like a column of Aberdeen granite, grey and firm knit, and having for the most part but little polish on the surface—at least what society calls polish; whether society is in the habit of always calling things by their right names, is a question which it behoveth us not to ask. Very outspoken, too, and with a keen, straightforward, truth-compelling look in the eyes of him. So much so, indeed, that carefully finished individuals like Mrs. Herman Kaye and the Misses Farbelook, were liable to a certain

uncomfortable feeling in his presence ; as though he were quietly taking stock of them, looking them through and through, and finding out, behind the brocaded curtains of their exquisitely polished society manners, a few things now and then which they had rather, very much rather, should not have been made public. Yet with a vein of such true, gentle kindness in the heart of him, such a power of brave, honest, sincere, manly love, as would make any woman very happy who should ever call Stephen Roden her husband. .

It was because his notions of womanhood were very pure and lofty, that he had lived on to past thirty years and written no name in his heart but that of his mother. Not that prying little Braeton or its neighbour Marbrook was any way satisfied with this position of affairs. It was a thing unparalleled in the annals of past history, that any eligible single gentleman of moderate income and good connections should locate himself in its vicinity, without very speedily falling a victim, and yielding up his peace of mind to one or other of the fair enslavers who fluttered about the lanes and meadows in their bewitching little straw hats, fancy jackets, and flounced dresses ; who peeped

so coyly and innocently from under the drooping feathers of the said hats, and wished him good morning with the daintiest blush and the prettiest lisp imaginable, if the Duke of Chartermayne's agent chanced to meet any of them on his daily round through the estate.

So when month after month rolled on, and not even the most practised gossip among them could whisper of Mr. Roden being seen at any time, or in any place, or under any circumstances with a lady on his arm,—when on strictest investigation it was satisfactorily ascertained that on no occasion whatever had feminine handwriting been discovered by the postmistress on the letters addressed to Mossingay cottage,—when Mrs. Brant affirmed on her honour that no white handkerchiefs marked with hair had ever by any chance come into her wash-tub, and that Master hadn't such a thing as a pair of embroidered slippers, but shuffled about the house in old leopard-skin canoes that might have come out of Noah's ark; and when Sally, who was very open to a little cleverly managed interrogation, gave it as her deliberate opinion that “Mr. Roden didn't ever wear anything but a steel curb chain to his watch, and never had no portraits nor little notes nor

nought of that sort a-scattering about when she dusted his room,"—the respectable female inhabitants began to look grave, and unanimously agreed that this state of things must not be allowed to continue; it was a slight upon them, and Mr. Roden ought to be let know it. Of course, if his affections were previously engaged to a lady at a distance, it was no concern of theirs, and they were sure they wished him every happiness,—every possible happiness; but if not, everybody knew that there were plenty of young ladies in Braeton and Marbrook that any man might be proud of, and they should consider it their duty to give him a hint that he ought to pay proper respect to them.

Accordingly maiden aunts who had grown-up nieces hinted to him that it must be very lonely living by himself in that cottage at Mossingay, and it was a pity but at his time of life he would begin to think about getting a home of his own; others expatiated on the advisability of settling early, it gave a gentleman such a status in society; in fact, nobody in Braeton was ever thought anything of until he became a family man and then went on to suggest, of course in the mildest way possible, that they could introduce him to one or two

nice young ladies with tolerable fortunes, whose affections they were quite certain were not previously plighted. Some, more venturesome than the rest, boldly came down upon him with a report of his having been known to call twice in one week at pretty Miss Brown's, and then watched to see if the affirmation called into his honest face the faintest tinge of consciousness, whereupon they might proceed to raise a theory of matrimonial intentions.

If Stephen Roden had been like some people who call themselves men, he would have felt amazingly flattered by this studious attention to his interests, and would have sauntered comfortably through the village day by day, and dropped in to a glass of wine or a cup of tea at one place after another, with the pleasing consciousness that he was the object of speculation and curiosity to half the maidens and mothers in the place; or else, laughing the whole thing to scorn, he would have smilingly received their pressing civilities, and then gone home to joke with his male acquaintance on the incorrigible folly and pitiful wiliness of womankind. But being as he was, spite of his rough exterior, of an almost dainty taste in some things, it only worried and annoyed

him ; so that by degrees he dropped first one and then another of his “ friends ” at Braeton, and seldom even went into the village if he could avoid it.

Having given them this hint of his inclinations, the gossips gave him up for lost, and consigned him to confirmed old bachelorhood. One by one the young ladies ceased to promenade Mossingay Lane at such times as the agent commenced his daily rides. The maiden aunts stayed their benevolent assiduities, and invited him no more to tea. Papas gave up asking him to family dinners ; he was rarely pressed to join picnics and pleasure parties ; elder daughters ignored him when they made up little evening dances ; and scheming mammas, who had once praised him to the ceiling for his “ manliness ” and “ sense,” dropped suddenly down to speaking of him as “ Mr. Roden, poor man.”

For it was very strange how, once the tide of opinion turned, all went along with it. Mrs. Herman Kaye, for her part, was quite sure Miss Gabbatis had been labouring under a great mistake — as if Miss Gabbatis ever *laboured* under anything — when she informed her how exceedingly agreeable and well-informed the new agent was considered to be ; but really that lady, with

going about from one place to another so much, had got into the way of taking up anything she heard and believing it, so that it was no use trusting to anything she said about people. Mr. Roden had not behaved like a gentleman, and paid the attention to *her* daughter which Miss Clementa Kaye had always been accustomed to receive, and she should make a point of dropping him off her invitation list forthwith. Besides she had heard from a very reliable authority, that the income of the Chartermayne agent was only four hundred a year, and that was no sort of amount to be worth looking after. Clementa should never marry under seven hundred and a close carriage, even if she had to take a widower with a large family for it. The senior Miss Farbelook felt it her duty to state, that upon close personal intercourse with Mr. Roden—for she had invited him to tea three times, besides a family dinner, and a little dance one evening—she was seriously disappointed. His Church views were not sufficiently decided, and she almost had an idea, though she wouldn't for the world have it mentioned as coming from them, for fear of making mischief—people were so ready to talk; but she certainly *had* an idea, from a remark he once made, that his mother

belonged to a dissenting family ; of course, if it was the case it was very shocking, though he mightn't be at all tainted himself ; dissent didn't always run in the blood, but still it was a great let down to a person to be connected with it, and she should feel it upon her conscience to avoid any further intimacy.

The junior Miss Farbelook had quite made up her mind that he was an infidel. He didn't bow at church when the Creed was said, and that was enough for her, let alone anything else. She never thought a person was properly orthodox unless his head went down as low as the pew desk, at the very least ; and at the Creed of St. Athanasius it ought to go still lower ; she made a point of always stooping until she could only just see Mr. Eden's nose over the top of the book ledge, and she thought that wasn't at all too low. And he didn't make a proper reverence when the Gloria Patri was sung, nor the adoration verses in the Te Deum. In fact she couldn't get her eyes off him one Sunday ; he made no moves at all. She thought, perhaps, he might have got a stiff neck, or his collar was too tight for him to bend conveniently, and in that case of course she could have excused him ; but when it was just

the same, Sunday after Sunday, and she found out too by inquiry that he wasn't subject to stiffness, and had his collars starched only a very little, just to keep them in shape, she felt convinced that something was wrong. She wondered for her part that Mr. Eden didn't give him a hint on the subject, it was so very important that people should do the moves properly at church, it had such a very nice effect. She was sure that beautiful plume of Lady Albyn's, that she got from Paris last winter for her velvet bonnet, never looked so well as when she swept down almost as low as the pew top in the Athanasian Creed, it gave such a beautiful wave. Of course Mr. Roden might have his own views, everybody had a right to them, but so far as *she* was concerned, she should certainly never extend the right hand of friendship to any one who did not pay proper attention to the rubrics of the church.

Miss Tim, if she might be allowed to say what she thought, had never felt at home with the new agent. It was quite true she had once entertained an idea that he might do for her niece, as Mary Ann was getting fast on to nine and twenty, and she thought it was time she got settled; and she was sure she had put herself

very much out of the way to invite him to tea to No. 5, Braeton Villas, with an eye to seeing how things would go; but really when she saw he was so little of a ladies' man, and had no idea of making himself agreeable with filling up the teapot, and passing the sugar, and handing the muffins round, and so on, and took no interest in the little things that were happening in the village, and indeed wasn't what she considered a domestic character at all, she thought it best to drop the intimacy. She was determined Mary Ann should never marry any one who wouldn't be handy at a tea-table, and make himself generally agreeable.

Pretty Miss Brown, of Ivy Cottage, decided that Mr. Roden, poor man, wasn't the one for her; he was so exceedingly straightforward, and said just what he thought, and though sincerity was a very pretty subject for essays and moral books, it didn't answer at all for every-day life, and was a dreadful bore when people thought themselves obliged to practise it. And really Mr. Roden was no hand at all in a drawing-room, and was the stupidest creature in a quadrille that ever she came across. And so very backward in coming forward, and paying little attentions that might lead on to something else, and making himself

acceptable in young ladies' society. In fact, that evening when it had been so nicely contrived that he should see her home from Miss Davie's after dark, and she was reckoning on quite making an impression, he was so reserved and silent, and never gave her his arm, nor made any pretty remarks, nor offered to come in and sit with them when she got home, that she felt herself quite slighted, and made up her mind there and then that she wouldn't go a step out of her way to make herself agreeable to him any more.

And verily, as the feminine half, or rather three quarters, for there was a dreadful overplus of female population in Braeton and Marbrook, said, Mr. Roden was not what is commonly called a ladies' man. He could not saunter gracefully in white kids and enamelled boots round a circle of elegantly dressed girls, with a smile and a compliment for each, nor hover solicitously over the piano, turning the leaves for some young beauty, and whispering all sorts of delicate flattery between the bars, nor throw himself into a charming position on the sofa, and make talk for the rest of the company. Neither could he "drop in" of an evening, here and there and everywhere, to help the young ladies at their practising, or offer

to escort them to lectures and concerts, and finish up with supper afterwards; nor, in short, do anything that young gentlemen of the present day are expected to do ere they are pronounced "eligible," and receive the diploma which society confers on her successful graduates. All that Mr. Stephen Roden, poor man, could perform, was—his duty. More certainly than a good many people who have lived twice his time in this world are capable of, but yet not quite enough to render him popular among the *élite* of the village. For Braeton fashionables, like most other fashionables in this nineteenth century of ours, had divers requirements and codes of laws which were not to be found in the Bible or the Assembly's Shorter Catechism.

So by reason of these and sundry other shortcomings, it seemed on the whole that he was drifting down about as fast as he could go into the quiet shelter of insignificance and oblivion—perhaps, after all, the place where he would be most comfortable.

Things had been going on in this way for some years, when one evening towards the close of spring, he went to take Lizzy Machin her quarterly allowance from the Duke of Chartermayne.

Pausing at the door before he entered, he caught the sound of a voice that he had never heard before,—a quiet, gentle, musical-toned voice, so perfectly modulated that he could hear it quite distinctly as he stood there. Something in it reminded him of his mother's, as she used to read the Psalms to him more than thirty years ago in the little parlour at Kilcragie; and as he listened, a pleasant home-like feeling came over him that made him almost loth to go in and break the spell by finding who the voice belonged to. When at last he knocked at the door, it was opened by a young lady whom he had never seen yet, except in the west pew at Braeton church, a still, staid-like looking girl, who neither blushed nor simpered to find a strange gentleman standing on the threshold, but asked him to come in and be seated with just the same quiet dignity that she would have used alike to the Duke of Chartermayne or the village chimney-sweep. Lizzy Machin saw they did not know each other, and performed the ceremony of introduction in somewhat unconventional style.

“Don't be for going away, Miss, it's nobbut t' gentleman come to give me my bit o' money from t' Duke, an' a great kindness I take it for

him to fash hisself wi' lookin' after an ould body like me. Sit ye down, Sir; this is a young leddy from up yonder, at Braeton Lodge,—happen ye mind t' house, nigh hand them great beech-trees, going along Marbrook Road."

Stephen replied that he did, and acknowledged Maud Harcourt's quiet bow with a certain grave stateliness. He was always very chivalrous in his bearing towards a woman, whether she were an Indian squaw gathering firewood in the forests of the far west, or a high-born English maiden like this one who stood before him now, with all the presence of gentle breeding about her.

She did not stay many minutes, but only promised to see old Lizzy again before long, and then departed; just giving him time to note how modest and retiring she was — two qualities which stood foremost in Stephen Roden's list of feminine virtues. The first real lady, it seemed to him, that he had ever seen since he was a little boy eight years old. He did not check the old woman when, with the garrulity of age, she began to expatiate on Maud's kindness, getting up as briskly as her creaking joints would let her, and toddling to the cupboard to show him the bright new tea-pot which her "dear young leddy had

brought her last Monday was a week." And then proceeding to exhibit a warm winter shawl from the same donor, keeping up a running soliloquy meanwhile on her lovable qualities —

"Marry, sir, but she's t' blessedest young leddy as ever came nigh a body. She comes reg'lar of a Sunday mornin to read me t' Psalms, an' she'll sit her down as humble like, Sir, on yon box you see wi' t' bit o' drugget atop, and she'll talk to me, while it seems like as if I'd got to heaven entirely, it's so beautiful. Oh, Sir, but it's a rare thing, is a godly up-bringing, like as she's had! Not as it does t' same for everybody though; for yon's her sister, Miss Mabel, I've heerd tell as how she never sets foot in a poor body's house from year end to year end; and looks as proud like at t' bairns in t' street, while they runs away for fear o' meetin' her. Folks is so different, you see, Sir. An' then, Sir — if you won't mind an ould woman's talk — look at these here stockins," and Lizzy pushed out from under her blue linsey petticoat a foot of most remarkable shape and proportions; "these here stockins, raal lamb's wool, Sir, if you look close at 'em; why, she knitten 'em last back end, just afore t' frost came on, you know, and bringed 'em to me herself

under her cloak ; and there's many a poor body in this village could say t' same on her. You see, Sir, I was sittin agin t' fire, a' warmin o' my feet, an' I'd gotten on a pair o' ould things as belonged to my husband, an' he's been dead twenty years ago come next hay harvest, an' there wasn't much left on em to speak on, for ye see my fingers is so drawed up wi' rheumatiz, while I can't frame to put a needle in to clout ought, if you was to give me all t' village o' Braeton for it. So she says to me when she seed 'em, 'Mrs. Machin,' says she, 'I'll bring ye another pair afore t' frost comes on agin;' an' marry but she did, Sir, an' these is them, and fine and menseful they is too."

The old woman withdrew her foot into the shade of the linsey petticoat again, and then seeing that Mr. Roden did not seem inclined to take up the thread of the conversation, but sat silent and thoughtful on the chair that Maud had left a while ago, she went on with the subject which was lying nearest her heart.

"It ain't my track to be saying ought o' other folk's ways, but it 'pears to me, most good as gets done here, she does it. Them Miss Farbelooks goes through a sight o' business, sir. I've seed 'em pass this windy o' mine as many as ten times

a day into t' church vestry just there, when there was goin' to be a meetin' o' some sort to mak' up what they call a ladies' report about trac's an' collectin; an' t' folks in their district says they're never clear shut o' 'em, but they're allus a peepin' in where they ain't expected, to see how things is goin' on, and whether folks keeps their places clean. An' as for talkin' — t' clergyman himself don't noways come nigh 'em for t' matter o' that — you never know when they mean to be done. But, law, Sir, it don't all do no good; poor folks likes to be left to themselves, and they'd rather get into a scrape o' their own makin', than run along smooth wi' somebody allus a-pullin' of 'em up and tellin' 'em what to do. An' ye see Miss Maud kind o' has a way wi' her, bless her, as don't rile 'em, and she never lets on at anything she sees, nor maks mischief among 'em. My old man used to say as how quietness was a excellent thing for a woman, and marry, Sir, I go for to think just t' same, when I sees what Miss Maud does wi' nought else."

Meanwhile Maud, peacefully unconscious of the eloquent benediction thus dispensed upon her, had wended her way home, and was sitting in the drawing-room, playing the daylight out and the

twilight in, as she usually did, with some of Mendelssohn's "Lieder," while Mabel stood at the window dreaming away over the April buds and flowers, with that look half restless, half proud and self-contained upon her face, which had become almost fixed there now. She had been working most of the day at her picture of Ary Scheffer's "Beatrice," and there was something in its utter stillness and peace which jarred instead of soothing her thoughts. Would it be possible for her ever to stand on any sure foothold of faith, or rest and look upward with a face so calm?

No one played those songs of Mendelssohn's like Maud Harcourt, no one ever interpreted so magically those subtle changes of gaiety and sadness, wild, up-sparkling fancy and tender thought, or made the tide of music rise and cover all the meaning which lay within their wondrous chords and harmonies. It was as if she found her own life in them rippling along with their rills of gladness, or widening out into their deep, clear melodies; and were just simply remembering or hoping with the music, talking to herself and to him, that prince of German masters, as she played.

So those two watched in the twilight, while

Stephen Roden walked home from Lizzy Machin's cottage, dreaming too, perhaps, for he never paused for greeting and speech with any one. Miss Gabbatis passed him with her green umbrella, and would fain have had a little bit of chat, but he went on without seeing her, or indeed anybody else, until he came to Mossingay Cottage, and deposited himself in the office arm-chair to think at his leisure.

Where we found him at the beginning of this chapter, leaning back, meditating on the clear dancing flames—Mrs. Brant always took care to have a nice tidy fire against the master came home ; it made all the difference in a man's temper, she thought, whether the hearth was tidy and his slippers put to warm or not ; not that *her* master was anyways ill-tempered, thank goodness no, for she'd never known what it was to have a crooked word from him yet, except about that letter which got lost, and it was no use raking that up any more ; but she did think a bright fire improved even Mr. Roden, and made him seem more cheery like, for he was apt to get moody sometimes, poor man, with living so much alone — leaning back, then, in this great arm-chair, with his hands folded behind his head, a

very favourite position when he was thinking about anything, and with his feet clad in the leopard skin canoes aforementioned, poised upon the shining hobs.

And there are a good many visions coming up before him, now that he is fairly quiet and settled down. Visions of another sort of fireside, at which he might sit some of these days not alone. For he begins to think that after all it is rather drear work coming home night after night to silence and solitude, to sit there in that black little office with the blinds drawn and the shadows lurking about so moodily, and no one to speak to or to caress, or to be to him what Stephen Roden well knew he could be to some one, if that some one ever came in his path. And then the little figure rose before him again with its grave, sweet dignity, its bending grace, its gentle retiring quietness, just as he had seen it an hour ago on the threshold of Lizzy Machin's cottage; and he heard the voice so quiet and self-contained, holding so much of thought, of womanly purpose within it, and he said to himself, sitting there alone in the half dark —

“ If ever I marry, it shall be Maud Harcourt ! ”

CHAPTER IV.

Braeton, April 27th.—I walked home with Stephen Roden through the Lingold Wood this afternoon.

After all, this Braeton of ours is a pretty place, a very pretty place; “luring the eye to rest upon its far-reaching expanse of hill, and vale, and woodland,” as the guide-books say, only the worst of it is, these tourists’ companions are not always to be depended upon, as papa and I found to our cost when we went for that trip through Wales the year before last. Deceiving you, as they often do, with magniloquent descriptions of an “umbrageous wood,” which turns out to be a colony of half a dozen spindly poplars, or luring you to perambulate the neighbourhood in search of some “dancing rill” or “picturesque cascade,” which has no existence save in the foolscap octavo

volume that lies at the top of your portmanteau—or they raise your expectations to the very highest pitch by rapturous flights of imagination concerning sundry clusters of exquisitely romantic cottages, which collapse upon personal inspection into clumps of amorphous mud-built tenements, with pigs wandering up and down, and ragged little children that don't patronise pocket-handkerchiefs pestering you for half-pence. No, save me from guide books.

But, I do like this Braeton of ours, for it is as pretty, and ten times prettier, too, than the most elaborate guide-book in the world could make it. And if the people that belong to it are not exactly all that one could wish them to be, well, we must keep ourselves to ourselves and manage to do without them, just as I have been trying to do for these ten years past. I never saw the village look prettier than it did when Mr. Roden and I came upon it from the Lingold Wood. The elm and sycamore-trees that line the road on the Marbrook side were so green, so very green and fresh; the chestnuts that stand in front of Lingold park-gates held the sunshine and the shade so beautifully within their great outspreading fronds of foliage. There are no such trees anywhere as

those in Lingold Park ; Sir Everard may well be proud of them, for even the Duke of Chartermayne himself can't match them on all his great Mossingay estate. And then the wood—our Lingold Wood—oh, what a bright, fresh April smile it wears now, how the young leaves frisk and flutter in the sunshine, how the light plays hide-and-seek in the long flowery dingles, and thousands of voices whisper and sing through thick green leafy aisles ! Yes, it is very beautiful in Lingold Wood ; I wish I had any other word than that to describe it ; I wish I could tell all that it says to me,—but I can't.

Mr. Roden thought it was beautiful too, as we came along this afternoon ; I could see that by the looks of him. I daresay if he had been a poet, as so many people fancy they are now-a-days, he would have raved about the fair face of nature, and stared at the innocent flowers till they blushed again, and given his hair a majestic sweep back, and begun to recite some fantastic nonsense about the oversoul and the pervading presence of beauty, and nobody knows what. But Stephen Roden is not a poet, he is only agent to the Duke of Chartermayne, and had been all the day measuring timber at the Marbrook corner of

the Mossingay estate. So instead of sentimentalising over the prospect, he just walked quietly and steadily along, practising the bass part of Mendelssohn's fine quartet, "When the West," and stopping every now and then to look at some bit of moss, or listen to the wood pigeons that were cooing in the distance. Mr. Roden has a great fancy for pigeons and their cooing. I have known him stand and listen to them for a quarter of an hour together in our garden. I say now that argues a nice domestic taste in a man. When I came alongside of him, he stopped his practising, and began to inquire after the health of the good folks at home, but I requested him not to suspend the performance, and offered to take the soprano part myself. And very prettily we went through it, for Mendelssohn's music always sounds well in a wood, there is a breezy charm about it which suits without-door beauty. What would the gossips of Braeton and Marbrook say though, had any of them chanced to meet us thus engaged? Nothing less, surely, than that the world with all its decencies and moralities was coming to an end. Mrs. Sharrup would have a tea-party to discuss the subject the very next evening, if her friends could be got together at so short a notice.

But fortunately we did not meet any one. So we got safely to the entrance of the wood, and then he shook hands with me, begging to be remembered to papa and mamma, "and also," he added after a pause, "also to your sister, Miss Maud." I told him Maud had gone over to Marbrook to spend the day with Miss Nunly, who had got her brother from the University staying with her. Then he went his way to the Mossingay farm, and I mine home. I noticed though, when we parted, he did not resume his vocal performances, but walked thoughtfully along with his hands behind him, a position they often fall into when he is in a brown study.

I like Stephen Roden. I have a thorough downright respect for him. For all he's plain and tanned and bronzed, and has very rough hair and whiskers, and doesn't understand Longfellow, and never read a line of Shelley, I like him. For all he doesn't keep an extract book for tit-bits of poetry, like Mr. Euston Kaye, and never carries a white cambric handkerchief, and although he doesn't wear a brilliant guard and a fancy neck-tie, and though he can't talk to you by the hour together about the last new novel or the favourite opera, and though he can't dance a single step, or

enter a room with a flourish, I do thoroughly respect and honour Stephen Roden. There isn't another man anywhere, except papa, and perhaps our old rector, that I esteem so much.

I am beginning to find out now what I have thought for long enough, that in the absence of what we call polite education, college lore, and society manners, there may be the truest, worthiest refinement, the fairest honour, the most winning kindness, the noblest bravery and truth. All these I have found in Stephen Roden—and a great deal more, too. Which is best, now, a character that has been painted, and trimmed, and smoothed, and polished by education, until not a single angle is left, or one free, natural, unglossed—one might almost say, for some things, rough—like Stephen Roden? I think the latter. I know well enough which I would decide upon.

Mr. Roden always gives me such an indescribable feeling of freshness and relief. I cannot help saying to myself when I see him, "This is a man;" an affirmation one cannot safely venture upon touching every wearer of overcoats and peg tops. And he is very gentle, too, with all his *gaucherie* and quaintness. I noticed this after-

noon as we came through the wood, that he stopped to right a poor beetle that had fallen on its back and couldn't turn itself; and also when a little spotted lady-bird alighted upon his coat sleeve, he removed it very carefully, and laid it safely upon a leaf. Would Mr. Euston Kaye have done so? or Mr. Herbert — the gentleman who handed me in to supper the other night at Miss Ducie's party, and talked so expansively about his love of the beautiful? — or Mr. Egerton, that vastly philanthropic gentleman who comes here about poor rates and parish improvements? I opine not. Would all, or any of these gentlemen, have stopped the current of their discourse to administer justice to a distressed beetle? or to see that a poor insignificant fly got suitably landed on a leaf? Did I not notice, too, the gentle, the almost womanly look that came into his eyes, unromantic grey though they are, when he was telling me about poor widow Elstone's only boy, who had fallen from one of the farm stacks and broken his arm, and asking me if I would send Maud to visit him now and then — he seems to have found out pretty soon that Maud, not I, is the right one to go and see sick people. And did not my opinion of him mount fifty degrees and up-

wards, when I found out, not by his own telling though, that for a whole week he had sat up every other night with the poor little fellow, in order that the old widow might rest herself, ready for her next day's work?

I think if I had a brother — if little Walter had been alive now — I should like him to be just like Mr. Roden; just so free from all hollow conventionality, just so plain — I mean in mind as well as in person, for I don't affect handsomeness — just so straightforward, so upright and candid, so kind and thoughtful in little things, so strong and reliable. Granted these qualifications, and I should be quite content even though he were profoundly ignorant of metaphysics, and totally unacquainted with the new school of poetry.

But I am thinking if any one could look over my shoulder just now, and read these last two or three pages, they would ask me why in the world I have been led to make such minute investigation of this said Mr. Roden's character. A very rational question, too; seeing that I, Mabel Harcourt, am not given in a general way to trouble my head much about the concerns of my neighbours. But I have my reasons for it, though I

am not going to confide them to you, most prying and inquisitive Braeton gossips. Perhaps some day Maud will know, my little sister Maud, coming up the garden now with that thoughtful look upon her face that she always has when she has been to see Miss Nunly. Yes, Maud, I think I will tell you some day why I have been using my perceptive faculties so diligently for the last few months.

Speaking of gossip, what a place this Braeton is for that species of produce! How they do hunt up and rejoice over a little piece of news; what a circumstance they make of a wedding, or a new baby, or a failure, or a funeral! If they can find a loose thread in anybody's character, how industriously they pick away at it until there is a regular rent made, and then they shake their heads and look so wonderfully solemn. The Marbrook people are not much better. Why, I think it was only the week before last that I was in Madame Darti's rooms, waiting to have a new dress tried on, while Mrs. Prance and Miss Tim were choosing spring bonnets, and I heard as much about the characters and doings of the neighbourhood as would have filled a newspaper, mingled with ejaculations of "Who would have

thought it!" "You don't say so!" "Dear me, how shocking!" "Ah! you see, things *will* come out;" and so forth. Who is it that says silence is an excellent thing in a woman? I'll give that man credit for sagacity, whatever else he may have wanted. Oh! for a spirit of silence to come down upon the female inhabitants of Braeton and Marbrook; or for such a visitation of self-scrutiny as should make every woman in the place intent upon her own concerns, to the exclusion of anybody else's.

I do think, in all truth and honesty, that whatever other faults I may possess — and I've plenty without a doubt — the love of gossip is not amongst them. I make my private observations certainly upon things, persons, and characters, and occasionally I write them down here, but no one else is ever any wiser for them. When I opened my career of young ladyhood, nearly five years ago, by going to Mrs. Grant Albyn's party at Marbrook, I did it with this injunction to myself — "Mabel Harcourt, you're about to enter the world, see that you mind your own business in it, and let other people do the same." And I am proud to say, that having now reached the

mature age of twenty-five years, I have never yet been referred to as the originator of any mischievous gossip whatever, a grand testimony for a resident in this neighbourhood.

But if I go on in this way I shall write myself into a critical humour, and then I shan't be pleasant company for Mr. Roden if he should chance to come in, as he does sometimes on a Monday evening to sit awhile with papa. Perhaps he will not want much of my company though, for I feel tolerably well assured by this time that — but never mind : it will be time enough to record my opinions when they come true.

Maud still paces up and down the long walk by the orchard hedge. There is a new look come into her face lately, the faintest ruffling of that calm, self-reliant expression which I have watched there so long. I can mark it now, for Maud's is a tell-tale face, and all that is in her heart looks out clear and truthful upon it. What will your future be, Maud? Will you shine the bright particular star of some peaceful home as you are now of ours — a home where the merry voices of children ring out as they have ceased to ring here, and where children's steps, your own

children's steps, shall dance and flutter round you?
Or will you stay with us always, Maud, our helper,
our comforter, our peacemaker? For I think we
could not spare you. Stay then, Maud.

CHAPTER V.

THE rest of Stephen Roden's journey homeward after he shook hands with Mabel Harcourt at the entrance of Lingold Wood was not accomplished under the most peaceful circumstances. It generally happens when we are taking a walk anywhere and wish to be alone, that we may think over something that has happened or something that has been said, our soliloquy is broken in upon, and we are forced out of our thoughts by the untimely appearance of a totally indifferent person. So hardly had Mabel disappeared behind the great beech tree that stood at the entrance of Braeton Lodge, when Miss Gabbatis made her exit from Betty Haye's cottage, and waylaid poor Stephen Roden just as he had got his arms comfortably folded behind his back, and was travelling off and away into his own cogitations.

Miss Gabbatis has not yet been honoured with a formal introduction, and perhaps that ceremony cannot be more suitably performed than now, as she emerges from under the little ivy archway which leads from Betty Haye's cottage, her green silk umbrella under her arm, her brown alpaca draperies fluttering in the April breeze, and a huge black velvet bag, now in a state of collapse, but which half an hour ago had been swelled out to apoplectic proportions by sundry papers of sugar, tea, oatmeal, currant buns, and coffee, dangling from her left hand.

Miss G. was a maiden lady of an uncertain age, so uncertain at least that none of the Braeton people had been able to find it out, though for the last twenty years they had been endeavouring to come to a conclusion on the subject. Once, however, whilst drinking tea at a friend's house, she had incautiously promulgated the fact of having been taken by her papa when a little girl to the top of a neighbouring hill to see the comet of 1811, so that, judging from this inadvertent revelation, which was eagerly pounced upon by the Braeton inquisitors, Miss Gabbatis must, unless her juvenile memory was remarkably retentive, have arrived, to say the least, at the

mature age of forty-five. Ill-natured people said it was more even than that, but others of more genial disposition affirmed that if she were as old as Methusaleh himself it wouldn't make a bit of difference, so long as she kept up her nice good-tempered pleasant ways, and had such refreshing little bits of news to carry about to her friends.

The father of Miss Gabbatis had been a clergyman, and her only brother was now a professor in one of the universities, so that by reason of these ecclesiastical connections she was received among the upper ten of the village, whilst her own kind-hearted, odd, unceremonious ways made her welcome among the others. For Braeton, spite of its secluded situation and scanty social privileges, had as profound a notion of its own importance as if it lived next door to the great metropolis itself, and doubtless stood even more rigidly upright in matters of etiquette. Mrs. Herman Kaye, widow of the late surgeon, held herself proudly aloof from the present Esculapian professor, because he only possessed a German diploma, and her lamented husband, she was thankful to say, had graduated in a legitimate manner and was properly acknowledged by the leading members of the faculty. The Misses Farbelook,

maiden daughters of the former rector of the place, never forgot that their deceased papa was a Cambridge man, and were accustomed to regard with a manifest elevation of their patrician noses the peculiar tint of the hood which depended from the white-robed shoulders of the worthy curate at such times as he ascended the reading-desk for Sunday morning service. The senior Miss Farbelook even hesitated to ask its wearer to a select dinner-party until assured upon credible authority that he had more than once received a similar honour from Sir Everard Albyn. The solicitor's lady, again, had been solicited in vain to leave her card at Mrs. Smith's new mahogany painted door, without sufficient assurance that her husband had never been "in trade," and Mrs. Smith in her turn gave the cold shoulder to the pretty Misses Brown of Ivy Cottage, because their father had amassed his comfortable fortune in the retail business.

Miss Gabbatis was a general connecting link between these various portions of the gold chain of English society. It was a matter of perfect indifference to her, whether the cup of tea that she so much delighted in was dispensed from the silver-crested urn of the late surgeon's widow, or

from the humbler Britannia metal of the pretty Misses Brown, or even from Betty Haye's broken-spouted piece of brown crockery, so long as the quality was good and the hand that poured it out a willing one. Neither was our brisk little maiden lady by any means a cipher in Braeton. Mrs. Darcy Pierpoint, sister-in-law to Lady Albyn herself, who lived at that pretty Elizabethan house on the Marbrook Road, and had as keen a scent for a bit of gossip as anybody, would have been utterly at a loss if she couldn't have had Miss Gabbatis over now and then in an evening after dinner, to tell her, of course in the most good-natured way possible, how things were going on in the village, how many servants had left that fidgety Mrs. Herman Kaye within the last six months, who was likely to get married, and when the wedding was to take place, and so forth. The Misses Farbelook also, who noticed every fresh gentleman that came into church, could not rest until they got Miss Gabbatis over to tell them all about who he was, and how he came to be sitting in Mrs. So-and-so's pew, and what was likely to come of it.

But we forget that all this time she has been walking alongside of our hero and doing her best

to shake him out of his meditations. If Stephen Roden had been a whit less honourable and straightforward than he was, he would speedily have extemporised an excuse for quitting his fair companion, and mounting over the first available stile in quest of some imaginary business or pressing engagement. But Stephen was not given to acting falsehoods any more than to speaking them; so he walked patiently on, and listened with grave attention while Miss Gabbatis informed him with her usual off-hand unceremoniousness what matrimonial projects were afloat on his behalf, what young ladies were suspected of having felonious intentions on his peace of mind, what conclusions had been come to about the strange gentleman with whom he had been seen walking arm-in-arm down the Mossingay Lane only the week before, &c. &c. After these preliminary personal observations, Miss G. turned the tide of talk over village matters in a general way.

“And so we are to have great changes, I hear, at Braeton Lodge, Mr. Roden; they talk of marrying Miss Harcourt to Mrs. Herman Kaye’s eldest son, the surgeon at Marbrook, you know, a very unexceptionable young man with a tidy fortune inherited in his own right from his uncle Euston

of Mossingay. Very good family the Eustons; old man took his degree at Oxford same year as my father did. I always said Miss Mabel ought to marry to a good fortune: she's just cut out for that sort of thing, you know,—has such dash and style about her. Very nice girl too, though,—was always proud of Mabel Harcourt,—used to teach her music a good while ago, and I always said she would make a fine woman one of these days. Well, she and Mr. Kaye have my best wishes, and I am sure, Mr. Roden, you will join me too," continued Miss Gabbatis in as confident a tone as if young Mr. and Mrs. Euston Kaye were at that identical moment starting off on their wedding trip.

Mr. Roden assented politely. It was a matter of profound indifference to him whether Miss Harcourt married Mr. Euston Kaye or the man in the moon, so long as she was tolerably comfortable. The next piece of news made a deeper impression.

"I suppose Miss Maud will be hopping off next. They say she's going to Scarbro' with her papa this summer for a good long spell of sea-air, and there aren't many young ladies come home heart-whole after a couple of months of that sort

of thing. I always said what a pity it was my parents didn't take me to watering-places, and then perhaps I should have got picked up too; but somehow or other I suppose I was never meant to get married, so it would have been no use if they had. I only hope Miss Maud will be careful in her choice, for there are a great many people of a very indifferent sort go to those watering-places. I always said Miss Ducie's sister made a very disastrous termination of her maiden career by giving herself up to that scamp she met with at Brighton — before your time though, Mr. Roden; and I think it would break my heart, for all it is a pretty tough one and never got a bruise yet, if dear Miss Maud was thrown away upon any one who wasn't properly kind to her."

Stephen thought it would break his too, but he did not say anything to that effect: he wasn't given to talking about his heart in a general way.

"I *did* hear," she continued, giving her umbrella a tuck under her arm—Miss Gabbatis always carried an umbrella, and if the sun shone, it did duty for a parasol — "I did hear some one say, and not so very long ago either, that Mr. St. John,—our curate, you know, Mr. Roden—used to hang about Braeton Lodge a good deal, but I

made it my business, as soon as I heard of it, to see how matters stood, and I don't think there was anything in it. You're not in a talking humour, though, this afternoon, Mr. Roden; I'm afraid I've disturbed you in some calculations about the timber,—agents are such ticklish people to deal with,—but you see I can't exist without a little bit of chat now and then when I meet anybody handy. There's no one at my cottage to talk to when the maid's busy, but the cat and kittens, and then the talk's all on one side, as indeed it has been this time, if you'll excuse me saying so, besides the chance that they don't understand what you say to them. But here we've got to Mossingay Lane end, and I don't like to venture over this stile at my time of life, so I wish you a very good afternoon, Mr. Roden, and I shall be delighted to see you at my cottage any time when you've half an hour to spare, to talk over things in a general way."

Stephen Roden escorted Miss Gabbatis a little way on her road home, and then, after this lengthy parenthesis in the current of his meditations, he folded his arms behind him again and resumed his original plan of thought.

Two somewhat ugly reflections rose prominently

before him. In the first place Maud had been spending the whole day with that grand intellectual brother of Miss Nunly's; perhaps at this very time she might be sitting in the old wainscoted parlour with him, talking over Schiller's sweet love poems, or hearing him sing his wild German songs, and was that a pleasant thought? In the next place there was a chance of her going to Scarbro' before the summer was out, that hot-bed of flirtation and frivolity; not that he was afraid Maud would flirt with any one, or have a particle of bloom rubbed from the delicate purity of her mind, but doubtless he, Stephen Roden, was not the only person by many a one who had admired that same delicate purity, and others than himself might long to pluck the bonnie little flower from its stalk and wear it next their hearts. Maud would come back from Scarbro' as fresh as ever; he had no doubt of that; but for all other things she might not come back just the same.

Looking at these two presences of evil, and turning them about so as to bring out every possible point of ugliness, Stephen Roden noticed not the April sunshine glinting down upon the fresh green leaves, nor the merry twitter of the birds in

the elm trees by the churchyard, nor the manifold soft tints of the flowers that studded the hedge-sides, nor the tiny little half-uncurled downy ferns that at any other time he would have loitered to gather and admire ; but he walked on steadily and thoughtfully until he reached his comfortable domicile at Mossingay, and sat down in the well-furnished office room where most of his leisure time was spent.

Stephen Roden was very methodical ; he never did anything in a hurry or carelessly, nor let any interior perturbations disturb the calm and orderly disposition of his personal belongings. He took off his buff dogskin driving gloves, straightened the fingers, and laid them on the little corner table ; then he hung his loose brown overcoat on the peg behind the bookcase, with his hat upon it, and after sitting down for a minute or two at the low fireplace to warm himself—for he had been walking at a slower pace than usual, and so, as medical men say, diminished the circulation—he commenced working at the plan of the Mossingay estate which he was preparing by direction of the Duke. He had just got it conveniently spread out on the table before him, with the Ordnance survey of Downshire opened at the Marbrook

sheet, and the field sketches and surveys which he had been making the day before laid in proper order, when Martha Brant, his housekeeper, knocked at the door and presented him an official-looking blue envelope with a huge red seal.

“Put it down, Martha, anywhere where you can find room for it,” he said, without looking up from the sheet of cartridge-paper on which he was laying out a groundplan of one of the farmsteads.

Stephen Roden was a wise man, a philosopher even, though he did not know it himself, not being given to self-inspection. Better, a thousand times better, that he should be sitting there poring over those plans and surveys, measuring the dimensions of Farmer Smith’s nether scar field,—that field which he had drained so effectually only last year, though the Duke had never had an agent before who could make anything better than a bog of it,—and noting down the situations of the fences and dykes in the upper cow pasture,—better a thousand times he should be doing this than if, as most men would have done under the circumstances, he had taken off those strong boots of his, called Martha to bring him a pair of warm slippers, drawn his great leather-covered easy chair up to

the fire, stretched himself full length upon it, set his feet on the shining hobs, taken a cigar out of his pocket maybe,—only Stephen Roden didn't smoke,—and straightway plunged into a trough of gloomy reflections concerning the vexations incident to human life, the perverseness of people in going to watering-places, the miserableness of mankind in general and his own in particular. Yes, Stephen Roden was a wise man, not the less deeply hiding the love of Maud Harcourt in his heart because he had resolution enough to let needful common-place duties flow over it in a calm, even, steady tide. So he measured the scar field, and laid down the fences and dykes in the upper cow pasture, and then read the letter which Martha had brought in, and which, as he saw by the look of it, had come from Mossingay Castle. ‡

Next to being surgeon to a large village in cholera or influenza time, or head master of a hundred and fifty grammar-school boys, is the post of agent to a fidgety duke, so far as the cultivation of one's personal patience is concerned. Three times already that same week, and this was only Friday, had he been summoned from his cosy office quiet to receive from the Duke's own proper lips, directions for the building of a cot-

tage for the head carpenter, and doubtless this fourth expedition related to the same important subject. However there was no help for it. The Duke of Chartermayne's agent, if not versed in polite literature, had at least schooled himself well in the far more valuable art of self-control; so, without a single explosion of slang or bubbling of impatient invective, he prepared to obey the summons which the letter contained. Down came the hat again, almost before it had fairly ceased its oscillations on the peg, the dogskin gloves were drawn on, the overcoat wrapped round the broad strong shoulders, and off started Stephen Roden down Mossingay Lane for his two miles' walk.

"Bown to t' Castle agin, as I'm a livin' woman," said Martha, who was standing at the kitchen window to watch which turning he took. "Well, if my Lord Duke ain't t' most miraculousest specimen as ivver I heerd tell on!—fower times this here blessed week has he trailed master down yonder and back when t' day's work were done an' decent Christian folks was a startin' to wind up their watches for to go to bed. Marry, if I was t' master, it 'ud go hard but I'd send him a bill for shoe-leather at year end, an' Sally should ha' half

on't for cleanin' of 'em. I've set eyes on a sight o' queer folks in my time, for I'se sixty years old come next turnip sowin', but I reckon I never seed his match for wearin' out a body's patience onyhow."

"An such 'en a nice tea as I'd just takken into t' parlour for him, Granny, when yon letter came," said Sally, the little servant-of-all-work, a red-haired, freckled, good-tempered country girl, who was setting out some cups and saucers on the clean deal table for the kitchen tea. "Mun I fetch it out agin, or it'll all be as cowl'd as a cowcumber afore he gets back."

"Ay, wench, an' slip yon ham into t' oven agin, an' set t' muffins on t' hob. Master shall get his tea like a Christian if all t' lord dukes in t' world was agin him; an' while ye are doin', fetch them slippers o' his, t' buff leather uns, an' have em warmed agin he gets back, an' see t' parlour hearth's fettle'd up. I allers feels kind a' sorry like for a single man as hasn't got fixed wi' a wife to see after sich like bits o' things for him. Not as he'll be long afore he gets one if folks speaks truth, which they don't in these here parts, for Milly Dakin tould me last Monday was a week that he were a goin' to be married on to

that rich Miss Ducie, of Braeton—sich a pack o' nonsense!—just as if he wouldn't ha' told me afore he thought o' doin sich a thing, and me livin in t' family comin' and goin' for nigh forty year. Laws amassy," she continued, as Sally brought the tea-tray out of the parlour, with the ham already congealing into a pellucid mass on the white China dish. "To see the likes o' that now, an done to a turn as it were ten minutes afore he went away. My lord duke ought to feel that ham on his conscience, as I'm a Christian woman, which I humbly hope I am, an' sich lots o' poor folks destitute of the necessities of life in a manner. I'd like to know what sort o' stuff it'll be, hotted up again."

"Why," returned Sally, eyeing the white and rose-coloured substance with a longing glance, and then setting it down on the table to see how it would look in juxtaposition with the plate of bread and butter she had been cutting for their tea, "'pears like to me as if it would be sort o' tolerable nice anyhow. I shouldn't have no manner of objection to trying of it to see how it fashions to taste."

"Out upon ye, wench, ye're allers after summut to eat. Tak it away back to t' larder, and don't

be a fingerin' of it as you go, and it'll do for t' pigeon pie to-morrow. I reckon he won't want no tea much, folks never does when they gets put past their proper times; an' while ye are on yer feet ye may go up to t' store-room for t' woatmeal jar, best sort, mind ye, yon as I keeps in t' yaller jar wi' brown stripings round; he'll be smitten wi' a cowl'd as sure as I'm a Christian woman, wi' comin through them swampy fields this side Mossingay Hollow, all over shoe-tops as they'll be, and him none o' the strongest for all he looks so brave. I've seed more nor one of his fore-elders takken off wi' a 'sumption for nothing no more nor gettin' wet i' their feet; an' then go and fetch me t' big brass pan out o' t' back kitchen, this side o' t' copper it'll be, an we'll have him a sup o' wholesome gruel made." And having given these voluminous directions for her master's comfort, Martha came back again to her chair by the kitchen fire, and went on footing a Brobdignagian stocking for her only son, who was a labourer on the Mossingay estate.

The business which summoned Stephen Roden to the castle was just what might have been expected. My lord was divided in his mind as to whether the cottage door should be round or

square at the top, and also whether there should be a painted knocker affixed, or visitors be expected to use their knuckles for that purpose. He rather inclined to a knocker himself, as he informed his agent, except that it might tend to infuse high notions into the labouring classes if their dwellings were brought too much on a level with those of the upper ranks. And would Mr. Roden be so kind as to take the earliest opportunity of going over to the tile works at Marbrook, and request that the two chimney-pots for the said cottage might be supplied at the lowest possible figure, and without any unnecessary decorations. Having relieved his ducal mind of these important cares, he resumed his reading of the Marbrook Chronicle, and bowed his agent out of the library for a second two miles' walk.

But Stephen Roden did not think his expedition to the castle by any means so afflictive a dispensation, when, as he passed through the lofty park gates into the Braeton Road, he caught sight of Maud Harcourt, alone and unattended, some two or three hundred yards a-head of him; and he inwardly blessed the duke's crotchet about cheap chimney-pots, which had kept him talking for ten minutes longer in the library.

He knew that lithe little figure, every line and curve of it, well enough. The brown straw hat too, that he had watched for so often as he passed the garden gate, and the gipsy cloak falling in such pretty folds over her quiet coloured dress. And he knew the step, so graceful, so easy, so child-like as it was—he could single Maud out from a thousand by that step of hers, so like herself. How pleasant for him to walk along in her very foot-prints, to mark ere he tramped over them again how the blades of grass had risen after her elastic tread, and the daisies lifted up their half-closed crimson-tipped flowers; and to watch the long wild rose stems and honeysuckle branches still swaying up and down with the motion that a chance touch of her hand had given them. Yes, it was very pleasant was this.

If Stephen Roden had loved Maud Harcourt as most men love the woman they afterwards marry, he would at once have stepped briskly up to her, politely offered her his arm, said how inexpressibly delighted he was to have the opportunity of escorting her home, offered a few original remarks about the weather, complimented her looks, hoped she had had a pleasant walk, rung the front door bell for her, stayed to supper, with perhaps a com-

fortable glass of brandy and water after it, and then gone home thinking what a lucky fellow he was to have happened on such a nice girl, and wondering how much her father would be willing to give her for a fortune. But loving her as he did, with a love very different to this, very different indeed, with a love that had grown upon him almost unconsciously, and sank very far down into his heart; with a love that had made her to him very holy, very sacred, hardly to be thought of but with a prayer, and only to be spoken to with purest reverence, Stephen Roden could but look earnestly at her as she went along, keeping lovingly in the track of her footsteps, and feeling that it was happiness enough to be within sight of her, ready to protect her if harm came. And so he followed her to the lodge gate, never coming nearer to her, nor saying one word of greeting; and when she half turned to look down the road before she went into the garden, a strange sort of shyness came over him, strong and firm though he was, and he drew back behind one of the old beech-trees, that she might not see him. Then when she was quite out of sight, he went his way homeward with a heart very full of pleasant, innocent thoughts, that might or might not ever come true.

Perhaps we do not think as we ought of the influences which our thoughts and fancies have upon us; we are not thankful enough for the kind ones, we do not watch against the evil ones. For those pleasant fancies of ours, even if they never "come true," are not all lost. The breath of love, human or divine, though it only just passes through the heart and is gone, leaves it purer than before. A very little spell of sunshine, here to-day and gone to-morrow, may have opened some flower which but for it would have remained for ever closed. So Stephen Roden, sauntering homeward after that little waft of hope, was conscious of new thoughts pleasanter than he had known before, of a something passing through his heart, which though perhaps it might very soon be gone, would leave him better for having known it only that little while.

"I'm thinkin' master's clean gone daft, then," said Martha, as Sally brought out the tea-tray an hour later, with a fresh slice of ham still untouched, and but a single quadrant removed from the well-buttered circumference of the hot muffin; "or he's been and gone and caught a cowl'd, nibblin' in this way like a week-old chicken. He'll be took wi' a 'sumption as sure as ivver I'se a

Christian woman, and then what'll become on us all?"

"I thought, Granny, as how folks as get took wi' 'sumptions, went off skinny and scraggy like, and couldn't do nought for theirselves."

"Toot, toot, lass, folks gets took different. I've seed him a gettin' thinner this six months back. Wasn't them last new shirts of his'n over strait by half an inch, so as I had to put bits o' tape on where t' buttons was, and noo they hang round his wrists like bags? an' that's him coughin' there, fit to tear his throat inside out."

"Nay, Granny, it warn't him, it were t' ould clock givin' warnin' for to strike; it's awful screechy is yon clock."

"Out, wench; d'ye think I can't tell a cough when I hears it? But gie that gruel a good stir round, an' he shall ha' a warm supper, or happen he'll be horsed in t' mornin' and then we shan't get no readin'. I'm right glad I ha'n't my lord duke's misdeeds on *my* conscience!"

Stephen Roden was sitting before the fire, with his feet on the fender, for the night had fallen damp and cold, as Martha said it would. His plans and surveys were lying on the table in *statu quo*, while he made others of far different

dimensions. They had at last formed themselves into the shape of a quaint old farmstead, far up away in his own northern home, with Maud's smile for his sunshine, and her voice for his daily music, when Martha knocked at the office door, and brought in a steaming basin of gruel.

"It's a cowl'd you've gotten there, Sir, I know you have. I heerd you a-coughin' as soon as ivver you came in, so you mun even please to tak' this — it's best sort, Sir, out o' t' yellow jar wi' brown stripings, same as you got from Marbrook, an' then, Sir, you'll ha' prayers, an' we'll be off to bed."

"Very well, Martha, I'll do so;" and Stephen took the basin and set it down on the mantelpiece. Martha did not seem inclined to go.

"I'd like to see you begin on it, please, Sir," said she, looking first at her master and then at the gruel; "or happen you'll let it alone while it gets cowl'd, an' then it won't do you no manner of good. But if you'll only start o' supping it, Sir, I'm bould to say you'll find it that excellent it'll *mak'* you eat it!"

"Thank you, Martha, I'll begin directly."

"An' please, Sir, I hope you won't tak' it amiss, but I've lived so long in the family, comin' and

goin', Sir, while I feels a sort of nateral interest in onything as consarns 'em, an' it would be a vast load off o' my mind, Sir, if you'd be as kind as tak' yer lambs' wool stockins into wear agin; you'll find 'em laid i' your wardrobe, Sir, i' t' top drawer, at left han' side, along wi' them mufflers as Sally knitten for you last fall. If you'll excuse me mentioning suchen a thing, cotton ain't no sort o' proper wear for onybody as has ought to do wi' my lord duke, an' him dragging folks through mud an' mire after him as he does."

"Very well, Martha, I'll try and remember to-morrow morning."

"Yes, Sir, an' if ye don't, I'll think ye on again; an' axin' yer pardon, but ye haven't started o' yon gruel yet, an' all t' goodness is a steamin' out on it as fast as ever it can go."

Stephen, with a half smile on his face, reached the gruel down from the mantelpiece, and commenced attacking it; whereupon Martha left the office, but presently returned with a long strip of white flannel.

"An' may be, Sir, ye wouldn't mind just puttin' of this on afore ye go to sleep, it 'll do ye a power o' good, it will, for you're as *horsed* already as yon ould pump of ours in t' back yard, as screeches

so when t' watter gets down, an' you'll be lossin' yer voice entirely afore mornin'. I've aired it right well, Sir, afore t' kitchen fire. My grandmother used to say — an' she knew a sight more things than all t' doctor folk as I set eyes on—as how it were t' finest thing in t' world, were a bit o' white flannel — *white*, ye mind, Sir, put on i' this way afore——”

“Yes, thank you, Martha, I'll try and remember to put it on—you can go now.”

“Yes, Sir—an' ye won't forget t' stockings, top drawer at left han' side. Folks had ought to take care of theirselves i' sich a place as this here, wi' sich lots o' trees castin' a dampness. I'm thinkin', Sir, it weren't t' best thing ye could ha' done to ha' comed here, getting off yer vittles i' this way, an' catchin' cowl'd wi——”

The rest of Martha's speech was lost to history in the passage from the office to the kitchen. Stephen Roden did not exactly agree with that last-mentioned opinion of hers, but he did not call her back to tell her so; and having at length conscientiously finished the basin of gruel, he resumed the meditations so often interrupted.

He would have slept more comfortably that night, spite of Martha's choker and the baking

fire which she insisted on making in his room, had he known that Professor Nunly was just returning from the Marbrook quarries, where he had been all day chiselling geological specimens; and that Mabel Harcourt, instead of Maud, was making arrangements for a two months' visit to Scarbro' with her papa: also, had he known—what, however, he never did know—that little Maud herself, before she lay down to sleep that night, prayed for the kind Mr. Roden, who had been so good to widow Elston's boy. Ah, Stephen Roden, a *little* knowledge is, to say the least of it, an uncomfortable, if not, as the poet informs us, a dangerous thing. Have patience until you know all, as perhaps you may by and by.

CHAPTER VI.

STEPHEN RODEN belonged to an old Scottish family who had lived, they and their ancestors before them, for years and years in the little village of Kilcragie, not far away from the Highlands. Besides his name, and the blood which flowed in his veins, the old Covenanters had left him some of their daring fortitude, and not a little of their simple reverent faith, qualities as needful perhaps for upright walking in this time-serving age, as in their own far-off and troublous dispensation. His mother, an Englishwoman, had died when he was a little child. All the memory she had left him was of a kind loving face bending over his, as he knelt morning and night beside her to say his prayers; and of a sweet musical voice that used to sing Psalms to him on a Sunday evening after his father had gone to the

kirk. Truly little to remember her by, yet enough to be to him a stay and a blessing all through life. Soon after she died, his father married again, and little Stephen was sent to live with his grandfather at Dunlaggan, a village farther up among the Highlands.

Here, for learning, he had such as the village schoolmaster could give him, *minus* Latin, Greek, Algebra, French, and various other elements of the modern course. On Saturdays his grandfather, a shrewd far-sighted old man, used to take the lad with him round the farm, initiating him into agricultural mysteries, teaching him to guide the plough, to note the succession of crops, and the nature of soils, to measure land, and in short everything which a farmer ought to know: for it was the intention of the old man to hand over the estate to his grandson at his death, and so make Stephen a landed proprietor to the extent of some four or five hundred acres.

Here then, on the old Dunlaggan farmstead, he lived for many years, learning with what speed he might the fine old science of agriculture; learning also—what in too many schemes of modern education is forgotten—his duty to God and his neighbour; standing Sabbath after Sabbath

by his grandfather's side in the old kirk, listening to those quaint Scottish Psalms, the same his mother sang over him when he was a baby; ignorant for the most part, in that pine-wooded, hill-girt village, of polite literature, debating societies, and the like, yet well versed in such lore as the Bible, the Pilgrim's Progress, and Milton's Poems could give, and learning to be what perhaps University courses, Oxford professors, or academical tutors would have failed to make him—a God-fearing, God-honouring man.

But one calm June evening, near upon the hay time, and when the pine-trees round about Dunlaggan farmstead looked as green and kindly as ever pine-trees can look, old Donald Roden had his servants into the great hall to worship, and then bidding each one of them a cheery good night, as he always did, went up stairs to his wainscoted bed-room, from which Providence had so ordered it that he should never come down again, except to be carried by those same tried and trusty men to the grave in the kirk-yard where most of his family were laid. He had not thought to die so soon, for he was a hale, hearty old man, and had never had a day's illness since he could remember. So he had made no will,

and the heir-at-law came to take up the property, leaving Stephen to shift for himself as best he could.

A man who has a clear head, an honest heart, and a practical knowledge of farming, has no need to starve in this world. So thought Stephen Roden, and turned his steps towards America, to the far west, of which he had so often heard his grandfather speak. He had not much to leave in England. There was no mother to say good-bye to, no sister to keep him back. His father was a stern, rigid man, honest and straightforward enough in his way, but with little room in his heart for sympathy or love. And so it came to pass that at the age of twenty-one, not six months after Donald Roden's death, he found himself located in a rude tightly built shieling, in one of the western forests, a fertile tract of land at his disposal, a few pounds in his pocket, his mother's memory and the little Bible she had given him for his companions.

Here for a good many years he laboured manfully and bravely, felling, clearing, ploughing, planting, shooting with red Indians across the prairies, camping often with them in their wigwams, seeing much of human life and human

nature, pleasant and otherwise, never losing that touchstone of a noble soul, faith in his fellow-men, never forgetting, through all his toil and travel, the lessons he had learned in Dunlaggan Kirk, and ever keeping fresh and pure in that great strong heart of his, the memory of his mother, as a presence of purity and peace.

For twelve years he toiled in America, and then came home, bringing with him a fair competence, a rich stock of knowledge and experience, and that same heart which he had carried with him when he went, even the heart of a little child, simple and honest and faithful.

But Stephen Roden was not a man to be idle. The energy and contrivance which had worked so well for him in America must not be wasted at home. What should he do then? He was not a literary man, he had not the art of drawing round him a company of *savans*, neither would he much have relished their discourse had he been favoured with it. The city, too, with its gay, expensive pleasures, was not the place for him, brought up as he had been amid the simple tastes of rural life; so, after looking round him some time in search of employment, he at last stepped into the post of agent to the Duke of Chartermayne, on

the Mossingay estate. Here he had all he needed, work, leisure, quiet, rural life, besides the opportunity of intercourse with and influence over the labouring people, and scope for what he still greatly enjoyed, the exercise of his talent in farming and improving land.

Such, then, had been Stephen Roden's track of life from his boyhood in old Dunlaggan village, onward to his settlement in the pretty cottage at Mossingay, where we left him at the end of the last chapter, sitting before his office fire, with Martha's basin of gruel at his elbow, and his unfinished survey of the estate lying on the table. He sits there yet. Everything is just the same, only that the hands of the clock over the mantel-piece point an hour nearer midnight, and there has come down upon his face a look of great contentment and peace, as if from some very pleasant thought that he has been long cherishing.

Not handsome exactly, according to the world's judgment. Slightly uncouth, perhaps, as fine ladies and carpet knights might say, for those strong limbs are unaccustomed to saunter round drawing-room circles, and that stout heart has never beat yet under cambric ruffles and diamond

studs. A fine specimen of a man nevertheless, in that warm firelight, albeit a little rough. His hair is crisp, and brown, and shaggy, not altogether untouched with grey, and would be anything but an ornament to him were it not for the picturesque way in which it grows over his great forehead. His beard—shaggy too, what there is of it—shows the firm-knit outline of his lower face; there is a great scar across his upper lip, got in an encounter with some red Indians; his eyes are light grey—brave, honest, innocent eyes enough, but in no wise romantic, for they do not happen to be fringed with long, silky black lashes, like those of most heroes, neither are they given to kindle with excitement, or flash with passion, or melt with rapture, or indeed perform any of the feats usually attributed to the ocular organs of pen and ink celebrities;—no, the only charm of those grey eyes is the honest soul which looks out from them: charm enough that, surely, yet not always sufficient for the world's captious taste. His lips, too, are firmly chiselled, fixed, and decided in their expression, almost stern, one might say, but for the half unconscious smile which comes and goes upon them now.

There, he has finished his musings, he will put

his plans and papers away, and have the servants in to prayers. A tall Herculean type of a man he looks, as he rises and clears the table. Broad shoulders, that have borne a good many heavy burdens through the American forests; a deep square chest, which does its best to contradict Martha's assertion that its owner will certainly fall into a 'sumption; and look at his hands, nervy, energetic hands, instinct with power and purpose, not exactly the kind to grasp the white-gloved fingers of a ball-room belle, or to rest on some young beauty's marble shoulder in the mazes of a fashionable waltz, but pure and white nevertheless as any they may clasp in this world; hands that never took a bribe, or did a mean action, or lifted themselves against the defenceless.

He has put away all the papers now, he has folded up the plan of the Mossingay estate, and laid it safely in the old walnut cabinet; his plotting scales, rules, and compasses are packed away in the office drawer, for Stephen Roden is very neat in all his ways. Now will he ring for Sally and the old housekeeper? No, not yet, for he draws the easy chair up to the fire again, and leans back in it, and puts his feet on the fender,

and folds his hands behind his head, and falls to thinking. Who said those lips were sternly cut? Not the sort, it is true, for whispering soft nothings to sentimental young ladies, or pattering chit-chat at an evening party: but see how their strong lines melt and soften into a smile, almost a child smile, it is so innocent and fresh. He is thinking of his mother perhaps, as she sang him the old psalm tunes those long ago Sunday evenings, and of her voice as she taught him his daily prayers. Or of those pleasant days, those days of early youth and coming manhood in the old farmstead at Dunlaggan. Or is it some memory that we know nothing of, of wild forest life in the far west, that comes back upon him now, and brings that half sad, half pleasant look upon his face? No, none of these; for see, out of that little book that lies on the arm of his chair, he takes a spray of young sycamore leaves, small, delicate, olive-tinted sycamore leaves, the same leaves that only two hours ago hung in sunshine over the pathway on Braeton road, the same leaves that Maud Harcourt gathered, to look for awhile at their graceful outline, and then dropped them on the grass, knowing not how precious her touch had made them. And as he lays the little

spray tenderly on his broad palm, and bends down over it, the smile deepens and brightens, and—

Ah! the servants will not be called in just yet; ten to one but careful Martha, overhauling your wardrobe to-morrow morning, will find the lamb's-wool stockings still calmly reposing in the top drawer, “left han’ side, ’long wi’ them mufflers as Sally knitted last fall,” and the strip of white flannel that was to have cured your imaginary sore throat, hanging unused and unthought of on the chair where she laid it an hour ago.

Good night, Stephen Roden.

CHAPTER VII.

Braeton, June.—How insufferably hot this June sunshine is. I have brought my book out to-day to the Lingold wood, and am sitting here on an old tree trunk, just beside the Mar brook.

It does put me out of temper so, this hot weather. I can hardly give a straight answer to any one. Papa feels it too. I don't mean that it puts *him* out of temper, nothing ever does *that*, but still it makes him feel weak and poorly, so he talks of going to Scarboro' next month, and taking me with him for company.

Of course I am glad enough to go. I don't mind where it is, so long as I am out of this dull, stupid village. I wonder who would live in a village if they could help it, except for two or three weeks in early spring, and as many in autumn, when the leaves begin to turn. Least

of all in this Braeton, where everybody knows what everybody else has done, is doing, or is going to do; where you can't turn out in a new parasol without the women coming to their kitchen doors to stare at you as you go down the green; where the village children draw together in clusters to take knowledge of your bonnet, if you are foolish enough to put on a fresh one before dark; where you can't walk side by side, much less arm in arm, with an individual of the male sex, without having a pack of old maids, married women, and young ladies, down upon you at full chase, to find out where you are going to live, and if your wedding dress is bought yet; where, if you walk past their windows with your veil closely drawn down, people think you have been crying, and set to work to get up a tale about it; where you can't have the dressmaker for half a day without two-thirds of the congregation turning round next Sunday to see what sort of a costume you walk up the aisle in; and where—but I am tired of saying any more about it. And only two miles from Marbrook, too,—petty, gossiping, scandal-dealing, meddling Marbrook—where nobody seems to have anything else to do but find fault with other people, and talk about bad servants, and so.

forth. Surely never was any house so unfortunately built as ours. I have been at Papa ever so many times to go somewhere else; but it's no use, so I suppose I must even be content.

After all, it's rather humiliating to live in a world so full of people, and to find so few one can make anything of. Shouldn't I like to be in a great city—London, for instance—where I could do just as I pleased; wear summer bonnets three years running if I chose, or mount a fresh one every week, without any one being the wiser for it; where I could make friends with any one I liked—man, woman, or child—and feel comfortably sure it was nobody's business but my own; where I could walk up and down the streets, and wander at my own sweet will from morning to night, or look cross and ill-tempered as often as I chose, without any one asking me the why and the wherefore of such proceedings. Then, too, if I lived in London, I could hear good music and see good acting, and here I can do neither. Oh dear me!

Well, it's no use complaining. When we have not what we like, we must like what we have: rather hard doctrine that, but very necessary to be learned, specially for folks like us, resident in

a house situated half a mile from the village of Braeton, and two miles from the abbey town of Marbrook. I suppose people were not sent into the world to be happy; anyhow, if they were, great many of them miss their destiny, I amongst the number. I begin to think it's altogether a mistake to expect too much happiness in the present dispensation of things. To rub along in an easy sort of way, taking care to catch hold of as few hooks as possible, keeping a sharp look out for quagmires and slippery places, and trying to steer clear past them, is about as much as any one can do now-a-days. Silver slippers, it seems, are not for this world's wear.

And yet some people are very happy, very full of rest and peace. Look at Maud, she has just the same life materials as I have, but how differently she uses them. The same home, the same daily cares, the same common-place vexations, the same little trifling annoyances that work me up into a perfect worry sometimes; and yet how calmly she goes through them all, how sweet honey she extracts from even the nettles and thistles and dandelions of this Braeton place of ours. How many people she has taught to love her. How the little children light up their

faces to smile at her ; how the old women bless her ; how the voices of those rough, sturdy labourers up at Mossingay Park soften into very gentleness when they speak to her. They never do so for me.

Maud, Maud ! when I was a girl, and you were a very little girl, we used to call you dull, because you couldn't make your sums come right, and because you were such a long time over your problems, and because you couldn't learn lessons so fast as I did. We did not know then, Maud, that you would grow up to be the pet, and pride, and darling of our home, and of Braeton ; we did not know that you would learn so quickly, and practise so far better than I can, that hard lesson, how to win love,—a lesson, Maud, more valuable than all my problems, and algebra, and crayon drawing, and water-colour painting, proud though I am of them.

I see how it is, Maud ; you have no self-consciousness. You haven't an article in all your wardrobe anything akin to that mantle of selfishness that I have folded round me day after day, and month after month, and year after year, until it has come to be part of myself, very hard to be put off again—*very* hard.

I will try to copy your example. I, proud, stiff Mabel Harcourt, will learn from you, simple little Maud. I will try to make these stupid village people love me, and I will look friendly, at least as friendly as I can, at their yellow-haired children, and I will stand by you some evening as you teach those great, gawky, grown-up girls that come to your class on a Wednesday before church, and I will regularly turn over a new leaf,—that is, if I can.

But don't I know partly, Maud, what it is that makes you so full of rest and peace? Don't I know, at least can't I guess, what brings that pleasant look to your eye, and that makes the colour come dancing and rippling over your cheeks, and lights up your face — though it isn't what the world calls pretty, Maud, pardon me for saying it — with an expression which skin-deep beauty can never reach? Don't I watch Stephen Roden's eyes as they follow you about? Don't I listen to a gentle undertone in his rough, musical bass voice whenever he speaks to you? Don't I watch his face grow almost pale under its thatch of shaggy brown hair, and his whole strong frame tremble if your dress flutters past him, or one of your long curls

touches him? And haven't I known, over and over again, his sturdy British self-possession melt away into shy quietness when you spoke to him, looking straight at him with those steady beaming eyes of yours? And don't you, mischievous little sprite that you are, put on the dress that suits you best when you know he is coming? And don't you make your pretty brown hair look as nice as you can? And tell me, do your little fingers ever fly so swiftly over the piano as when you are playing the music for his songs? or does your voice, sweet though it always is, ever sound so sweet as when it sings to him? Ah, Maud! it is easy to be calm and bright when any one loves us, as I know Stephen Roden loves you.

Nobody cares for me that I know of. Nobody ever comes up this garden walk whose step makes my heart beat one bit faster, or wakes that "thrill of expectation" one reads about in story books. I just go on in a stiff, steady, haughty sort of way. I can't help despising the people about here, and they know it. Mr. Sharrup, at the grocer's shop in Marbrook, never makes me half such a polite bow as he does to Maud when she goes in to order things. The dressmaker never puts herself about to accommodate me, or turns

her employers adrift, here and there and everywhere, to give me half a day's work when I am in a hurry. Phillis Green doesn't pick me her freshest flowers if I go to buy a nosegay, and when I pay her she hardly says thank you; whereas if Maud were to go on the same errand, nothing in the garden would be good enough for her. The fact is, nobody likes me.

Mabel Harcourt, you are not remarkably attractive. People, at least sensible ones, would never think of describing you as "a nice, amiable girl." To tell the truth, if you were to go home and die without further notice, nobody would be much the worse for it. No one would mourn over the loss of pleasant words that you had often spoken; no old woman would wait in vain for your voice to read her daily chapter; no little child would watch for your smile and be sad to know he should see it again no more; none of the young girls here in this village of Braeton would remember words of kindly counsel that you had once given them, or care to keep your memory green in their hearts. Sitting here in the Lingold wood, with the June sunshine creeping tenderly round you, and the pure blue sky looking friendly upon you through this leafy roof, and

the flowers springing fair at your feet, and a merry insect hum stirring up the silence, and every thing, down to the little spray of moss on this old trunk where you sit, instinct with life and love, you say there is no one to care for you, there is nothing for you to do. Mabel Harcourt, whose fault is it?

Mine, I suppose. Well, I do believe I'm a sort of simpleton. I thought so a long time ago, but I'm quite sure of it now. It's no use troubling about it though at present, for the time draws on, and I must trudge back again over the hot fields, or I shall be too late for dinner.

After all, common-place people get on best in this world. I wish I was one.

CHAPTER VIII.

Braeton, June.—I have come up here this evening to write, because, as is often enough the case, I have nothing else to do. Mamma and Miss Gabbatis are talking together in the dining room just below. I can hear the merry little maiden-lady's voice go tripping and trickling and gurgling on, never caring for answer or interruption, but just one unbroken current of talk. And Maud—ah! well, I will not talk about that now.

I like old maids very much in a general way. I think a pretty fair portion of the good that gets done in the world at all is accomplished by them. In most cases they know what they've got to do, and they just do it. Somehow or other, I always feel a sort of drawing towards a woman who has entered fully and fairly into the honourable estate of spinsterhood, and has taken upon

herself its duties and responsibilities, which as I look at them are neither few nor small.

I think we pity single women a great deal too much,—not I at least, because I look forward to being one myself, but most people. Really, after all, when one has a comfortable income paid quarterly, a nice snug cottage in a genteel neighbourhood, a moderate share of health, a due allowance of good temper, and lastly, a heart trained to believe in the perfect love and wisdom of all that happens to us,—with these things taken for granted, I say it is not such an untoward destiny to find one's name written an old maid.

Now, there is our friend Miss Nunly, at Marbrook. I should like to see any one more thoroughly looked up to and useful than she is; always ready to do any one a good turn, to take her knitting and sit with an invalid friend, to relieve a case of distress, or help any one in need, or to give true sympathy to those who want it. I'm sure, if I were in trouble, I don't know any one I would go to sooner than Miss Nunly. It would be a downright shame if she ever got married, and had all those kindly offices and pleasant ways of hers monopolised by a husband. But she won't, I know; she's too good for the market. If

I were a man, I should as soon think of asking St. Cecilia for the honour of her hand and heart, as of requesting Miss Nunly to bestow herself, with all her excellences, upon me. Then there is something very stately, and reserved, and dignified about her, she is the most thorough lady I know. Lady Blanche Albyn herself could not receive a visitor with more graceful self-possession, or deter the advances of too forward people with more regal coolness than our Miss Nunly does. I should like to be just such an old maid myself when the time comes for me to step into the ranks. Some of my pleasantest afternoons have been spent in that old blue wainscoted parlour of hers, in the Abbey Close, at Marbrook, which looks down the long quaintly arranged garden to the river Mar. I like to sit in the tall, straight-backed oak chairs, which have been there ever since her grandmother's time, and look across the room at myself in that curious old mirror which minifies your face down to the size of a pea. How often, when I was a very little girl, has she held me up in her arms to look into that mirror, but she would never let me stand on the chairs to get a peep. And then, since I have grown up to woman's estate, what pleasant times we two have spent

together when Miss Keziah has been away visiting, in that ivied summer-house in the garden, built close down upon the river,—so close, indeed, that if you were disposed for suicide, you had nothing to do but open the window and just let yourself gently down; or if inclined to try life a little longer, sit there looking at the waterweed and flag leaves lazily drifting along with the current, and listening to Miss Nunly's pleasant old world stories of her early days. Yes, if ever I am to be an old maid, let me live in the Abbey Close, and watch the afternoon of life go droning on to the music of that sleepy Mar river, and the cawing of rooks in the old Elizabethan elm trees by the window.

But I did not mean to write all this. It is not what is uppermost, though I have said it first.

Everything has happened just as I thought it would. Our Maud is going to be married to Stephen Roden.

Yes, I knew how it would be long ago. I have watched them drawing closer and closer to each other while I stood apart and alone. And yet I did not think I should have had such a dreary feeling as crept over me when they two

came into church together last Wednesday night, and I knew the question had been asked and answered which should take Maud, my sister, away from me, and lead her out into a new life, with which I had nothing to do, and with whose joys and sorrows I might not intermeddle. And when we all came out of church together, and he took Maud to himself, as if she belonged to him now, which indeed she does in a sort of way, and I felt I had no more right to stand by her side or come in between them, a sharp, quick sense of something wrong shot through me.

When we got home, Maud did not come into the room any more that night; but very late, as I was passing her door, she called me in with the same voice, the same kind, quiet voice that had called me so often before, and that I had answered time after time, knowing that nothing stood between us. When I went in, she was sitting by the open window.

I could not see, in that dim, uncertain light, if her face was flushed, or if any other expression than the one I had known so long had come over it; but when she spoke to me about him, her voice seemed to me to have a strange, proud, musical thrill. I did not need that she should

tell me anything, for I knew it all, so I only sat beside her with my arm round her, and our heads resting together, just as when we were children. And I could not say anything to her. I could not even tell her that I was glad for the great happiness that had come to her.

It was strange the distance which this night had put between Maud and me. She had passed into a new world now, of which I knew nothing, nothing at all. She had great possessions, a heart full of hopes and joys, which had no meaning for me, with which I could not sympathise. It was as if, after long walking on the beaten high road of life, she had suddenly been taken from my side into some shady by-path, where bright flowers sprang up around her, and golden fruits hung over her, and songs of birds made music for her; while I was left to tread the dusty road alone, where there was no shade, no music. Was it indeed well to give her *all* the sweetness? And then there came over me the first feeling of envy I have ever had towards Maud, the first, and, thank God, the only one, for I have learned now to rejoice with her, and to be glad for all that makes her life happy.

But there was no need for me to stay long with

her that night, there was joy enough for her without me; so I came away, leaving her still by the open window, and when I kissed her I did not let my cheek touch hers, lest she should feel the tears upon it. Maud, Maud, some are made for shade and some for sunshine. Let us hope the time will come soon, when, seeing all these things in the light of perfect knowledge, we shall not wish them other than they are.

There is Miss Gabbatis talking away yet in the dining room. What is it about now, I wonder? Generally, if I am wanting to write to any of my friends, I wait until after Miss Gabbatis has been to tea. It is quite as effectual as buying a newspaper, she tells us so much of Braeton and its doings. I suppose when she goes to Mrs. Herman Kaye's, or Miss Farbelook's, she turns us over in the same way. And Maud and Stephen are walking in the orchard. I can see her buff dress gleaming through the trees, and her little brown straw hat, with a long drooping fern leaf which he has fastened there. I suppose they will not want me to walk with them any more now. Well, I must be content. Nobody ever cared for me yet, and I imagine nobody ever will. Perhaps there are worthier things in life than getting married and

living happily ever afterwards, as people do in novels and story-books; though I fancy, if the novels had a sequel, we should find out that in most cases things didn't turn out so complacently.

I will do my best to be comfortable. Perhaps after all I shall settle down into a nice, trim, chatty little old maid, like Miss Gabbatis, or rather—for this is a dream which has often come over me lately—I might rise to be such a one as Miss Nunly. I might live a life as pure, as noble as hers. That would be something worth living for. I often wonder what her past has been, by what steps she has come to that resting-place of thought and feeling. But I never like to ask her. There is a great reticence about her, as I believe there is in all truly fine natures, a backwardness to speak of her own life and experiences. I like that sort of feeling. I can't bear people that go about unbosoming their joys and sorrows to anybody and everybody who seems inclined to listen to them; people that have no mental window shutters, and that light the candles inside their hearts before the blinds are decently drawn down.

As I said before, it is not an unmitigated evil to be an old maid. Miss Gabbatis doesn't think

so, I'm sure, when she comes home and makes her own fire, and tidies up the hearth, and puts on her afternoon dress, and gets a comfortable cup of tea, and then sits down to write her diary. By the way, she once promised me the loan of that diary, and I must be at her again about it, or she is sure to forget. Just fancy me offering to let any one see *my* diary! I wonder what Miss Nunly thinks about it, as she sits night after night, in that wainscoted parlour of hers, listening to the cawing of the rooks in the old elm trees, and looking past the river and the Marbrook hills towards that great, busy, bustling city of Manchester, where she once used to live, and where I'm sure her heart lives now. Well, well, there are many things we must be content to let alone in this world.

Maud is not going to be married just yet, perhaps not till the summer after this next one; but she might as well be gone now, for she does not seem to belong to me any more. She is kind and loving as ever, for Maud's heart has room for us all, but somehow I don't feel to have any hold upon her now. It seems strange to me to see Stephen Roden, six months ago a stranger to us, coming in and out of our home now as if he were

one of us. And then the quiet way in which he takes possession of Maud, and carries her off to saunter about with him in the orchard or through Lingold Wood, whilst I am left here alone, nobody caring to take me out or make a fuss over me;—I do think I ought to be excused if I feel a little bit ill-tempered now and then.

I have read somewhere, but I forget where, that there is a something which does not please us in the happiness of our friends. I believe the man who wrote that thoroughly understood human nature, at least the worst side of it. This great joy which has come into Maud's life has made me feel weary and discontented. Not that I envy her; no, that is all past now. I know she deserves all the happiness that Stephen Roden or any one else can give her. But why has it not come to me too? why must I be alone? Is there no Stephen Roden for me in all the world? Patience, Mabel.

Last night she and I were sitting at our work. I had forgotten for a little while that she did not belong to me now as she used to do, and the old, thorough heart to heart feeling came over me, and we were talking away as merrily as could be about different things that came into

our minds, when I saw Mr. Roden walking up the garden. Then it was all over. I knew I wasn't wanted any more, they would be happier without me. I just spoke to him, and then went off into the orchard, where I had a good cry on the old seat under the pear tree. When I came back, an hour afterwards, Maud was playing for him, and listening to that rich bass voice of his as he sang. I stole quietly into the corner with a sort of extinguished feeling.

Well, I won't write any more in this strain. I'll go and hear what else Miss Gabbatis has got to say. I do believe women have an innate liking for an innocent little bit of gossip. I feel quite humiliated to think that I can enjoy it myself sometimes when there's nothing better to listen to.

CHAPTER IX.

YES, it was indeed true, as Mabel had said, Maud Harcourt was going to be married. And this was how it came about.

Stephen Roden was what most modern young ladies would call a matter-of-fact man ; that is, he lacked words to express those deep inner feelings which some people can turn inside out upon occasion, and chatter over so perspicaciously ; and there was a vein of truth running through the heart of him, which compelled him often to speak out, in broad, honest, homespun English, things which others might perhaps have clothed over with a delicate veil of flattery and double meaning.

The finest, best part of his nature had developed itself very unconsciously, as perhaps is the case with most that is worthy in us ; and by working out its own way so much, and living on apart from the sympathy or help of those without, it

had rather started off from the beaten track, and grown into a quiet beauty of its own. He had no sister to whom he could speak of the thoughts which for these past years had been creeping into his heart, and making it instinct with hope and longing, neither had he as yet found any friends among the young men of Braeton and Mossingay so exceeding choice and confidential that he cared to reveal to them his love for Maud Harcourt, and ask their advice as to the best means of bringing it to a safe and prosperous issue. For her name, and everything connected with her, was sacred to him, and he would have thought long, very long, before he had told even the best and worthiest of his friends all that she had become to him; thinking as he did, that a true, earnest love can gain nothing by being poured into any ear save that which is to listen to it all through life.

So that Stephen Roden had loved Maud for a whole long year before she knew anything about it. Coming home from Lizzie Machin's cottage that April night, and sitting down lonely and thoughtful by his office fire, the thought of her had crept into his heart, and nestled there, at first unconsciously to himself, but afterwards becoming the brightener and purifier of his whole life.

They never met again for many months after that night, never indeed until one Sunday in the autumn time, when they were coming home from evening church, and Mr. Harcourt asked him to go in and sit with them awhile, which he was glad enough to do. After that he used to go in sometimes when his work was done, and the office at Mossingay cottage began to feel cold and lonely, as indeed it often used to do. But he rarely spoke to Maud. It was enough to know that she was there, to be within sound of her quiet-like voice, to feel sometimes the fluttering of her dress close past him, or the touch of her little fingers when she shook hands with him,—a touch which sent him home all through that long, dreary Mossingay lane with such a quick feeling of gladness at his heart, and yet made the office seem ten times more cold and lonely when he reached it.

And what was Maud thinking about, all these months? Did she know how firmly, and faithfully, and lovingly lay the thought of her within Stephen Roden's heart? Did she know how many and many a time his eyes followed her as she tripped past the lonely cottage at Mossingay? Did she know how night after night he sat by that office fire, thinking only of her; and did she

know that it was the thought of her which made the warm tears tingle in his honest grey eyes as he watched her, unnoticed himself, through the thick green glades of Lingold Wood?

No, innocent little heart that it was, she knew nothing about all this. She did know, though, and perhaps it was quite enough for her to know, that the never evenings were so pleasant as those when he used to come to sit with her papa, and talk over the improvements he was planning on the estate. She did know that never any flowers were half so sweet, or lasted half so long, as those camellias and heliotropes he once brought from Mossingay castle and that no walk, even with Miss Nunly herself, ever seemed so pleasant as that one through the long Mossingay lane, when the rain came down in torrents, and Martha Brant, who was standing at the back-yard door watching it, insisted upon having her into the parlour to dry her cloak, and Mr Roden himself had come out of the office to see her home after the storm was over. But Maude did not ask herself why any of these things were so. She was not one of those who for ever pry down into their own hearts, trying to find out the why and wherefore of every chance streak of joy or sorrow, making life one long, vexed, weary

unanswered question. She lived on thankfully in the calm unconscious present; the past serving only for pleasant recollection, the future for unswerving trust. So, night after night, alone in her little room, after days filled with loving, cheerful duties, she thanked God that she was so happy, knowing not why the sunshine was, nor whence it came. And when morning and evening Mr. Harcourt prayed for all those who are near and dear to us, she thought of Stephen Roden, and said, Amen.

But it will not do for a man to be always in suspense. One night, after long cogitation in that lonely old office at Mossingay cottage, he determined that he would take the first chance of telling Maud bravely and straightforwardly all that was in his heart. And it came before long.

The time was towards the end of spring, before summer with its weary breath had anywise dimmed the tints of the fresh young foliage, or curled up with its scorching heat even the tiniest leaflet of the great spreading ferns that greened over Braeton plantation.

It was a lovely spot, that Braeton plantation, clothing the steep, craggy slopes of the Brae, and stretching along the roadside for nearly a mile,

until at one end it lost itself in a wide heathery moorland, and at the other opened out upon the high road leading to the village church. Midway up the ascent a path was cut which led round the hill; fir trees, spruce, larch, and pine covered the height above, stretching up thicker and thicker, until at the summit their clearly-cut branches formed a deep serrated line against the sky. English woodland trees filled the broad slope below, smooth shining birches, dark-leaved whispering plane trees, tough gnarled old elms, stretching their knotted branches through the thick shade. Dark green chestnuts sheltered an undergrowth of brilliant moss and primula, dappled over with great patches of harebell; tall sceptre-like blossoms of crimson fox-glove, wind flowers white and delicate, wild hyacinths, and primroses, and pansies, nestled among the long grass, with here and there an oasis of sea-green brackens undulating to and fro with a wavy dream-like motion as the wind swept up across them, and stretching far along the slope, quite down to the noisy little Mar brook, which separated the plantation from the high road. Farther round the hill, the path led into an old pine grove, black, sombre, and desolate as any

Norwegian solitude, where the gaunt trees thrust out their long arms clothed with tattered shreds of grey lichen; and through and through, as far as the eye could reach, was no green either of leaf or moss, but only straight red-brown trunks and sad-coloured lichen fringes. It was like going from spring, with its bright up-gushing joyousness, into the dead stillness of winter, or from a fresh young merry life into one all blackened and crusted over with sorrow, to turn out of Braeton plantation into that pine-tree grove. On the other side, only separated from this by the high road and the Mar brook, rose another craggy slope, fringed like the Braeton side, with fir trees mixed with English wood. One end of the valley which these two formed, opened into a wide reach of country stretching miles and miles away to the east; at the other, Braeton church rose from behind its veil of trees, and beyond it the Downshire hills, with their rocky watercourses and rifts of purple moorland.

Very pleasant it was to come along this winding woodland path — we speak of it in spring or early summer — to watch the long shadows creep up from the valley beneath, and the soft grey tints of evening spread over the east country, and

the cold blue haze come up from the river upon the broad masses of foliage; and to listen to the ocean-like whisper of the wind among the fir trees, and the babbling of the Mar brook far away down below, and to dream in these thick green solitudes of things that might be.

Just as Stephen Roden was dreaming one Wednesday evening in this same Braeton plantation, when he saw Maud a little way on before him, going along so gently, so unconsciously, with that even graceful-like step of hers, never thinking that he was so near her.

How often it is, when time brings us to the wished-for crisis of our lives, when all, whether of past or present, is concentrated in one vivid, momentous *now*, that we would fain escape from it and be back again in the old beaten track; that we shrink away even from the presence that we most long for, and fear to speak the words which may unlock for us the portals of a new life. So, walking on the very track of her footsteps, and watching with tender gaze the trembling of each little leaf as she passed and stirred it, Stephen Roden felt a strange awe come over him. He could have hidden himself there among the thick fir trees, away from even the feeling of her presence; and when by and by she stood still

for some moments to listen to the long murmuring notes of the wood pigeon, he lingered too, not daring to overtake her, and half afraid, strong and fearless though he was, lest she should turn and see him.

She was on her way to the evening church. There was a thoughtful look upon her face as she went along, for she had just been to see Mary Rae, the gamekeeper's daughter, who was in consumption. She could not but contrast the poor girl's life, so slowly dwindling away, until there remained for it no future but that of eternity, with her own so full of promise, so full of quiet happiness, so shone upon by a light whose source and full brightness as yet she knew not. Everything for her was so peaceful. There was such a glad undertone in the unwritten music of nature, such a pleasant meaning in all of beauty that was around and over her, such a quiet answer from her own heart to blend with that other voice in which God was speaking to her out of each leaf and flower and tint of his beautiful world. Thinking of all these things, she did not hear Stephen Roden's step on the soft grass behind, until turning to pluck a cluster of fern and harebell, she found him close upon her.

Maud did not start, nor blush, nor tremble. The flowers she held in her hand did not even quiver on their tiny stems, except as the wind moved them. He had dwelt so quietly in that innocent thought-world of hers, and had become so unconsciously blended with all its workings, that to wake and find his actual presence close beside her, was nothing strange. It was only another sort of sunshine blending with that which flushed up already through the long aisles of glistening leaves, and the green-mossed slopes of the plantation; only a most natural and genial filling up of the still-life beauty amid which she stood. All she knew about it was, that the warm light pouring down among the old fir trees seemed tenfold warmer for his presence, and that the blue sky looking in through glinting, flickering leaves, had more of beauty in it because he was there. So they shook hands and walked on together, for it was but a little way to the plantation gate, which opened into the high road; and they could even now see the sunlight yellowing the gnarled old trunk of the elm tree that shaded it.

Stephen began to talk of the commonest things he could think of, just to keep himself from being

silent and awkward, for his heart was very full, and he could find no words to say all that was there. And if ever he tried to begin anything that might lead on to it, the words held fast and would not come; and he was thankful for even the chirping of the sparrows and the melancholy coo-coo of the pigeons, and the eddying of the wind through the fir trees, to break the silence that ever and anon came up between them. For he was not a man that could make pretty speeches. He could not assure the quiet, innocent little girl beside him, in the most exquisitely turned of sentences, that the felicity of his whole future existence was at the mercy of her smile; he found it difficult to affirm in due grammatical phrase that her happiness was inexpressibly dear to him; and that nothing would afford him greater pleasure than to be permitted to take it into his sole and special keeping during the term of her natural life. The thousand and one graceful little inventions of modern social intercourse by which one's real, true heart questions are wrapped up in sugary *bons mots*, after the fashion of motto crackers at an evening party, were unknown to him. So he decided, and perhaps it was the wisest thing he could decide, to tell her just as it had

shaped itself in his own thoughts, the plain un-
adorned truth.

They had come to the gate now, which led out
into the road. She was going to open it, but
Stephen laid his hand over hers, and gazed down
upon her with a look in his honest eyes she had
never seen there before.

“Maud, I love you very much; do you love
me?”

Just then the railway whistle came shrieking
long behind the hill; now clear and sharp and
well defined, then broken by the thick shadowy
woods; anon dying off in a slow, eerie mono-
tone, broken by short, abrupt sighs of sound;
after it the rattle of the train through the
settling and into the open country beyond.
Maud did not know then that in years to come
she should stand there under the old elm tree,
listening to that same sound with a sadness the
world has no name for. When it had faded out,
there was utter stillness for awhile.

Everything was very bright and beautiful in
the Haeton plantation that Wednesday evening. The
 merry sunshine danced and sparkled everywhere,
sunshine flickering upward, sunshine flickering
downward, sunshine flickering round and round,

sunshine on the thick green chestnut tresses, sunshine on the white-veined ivy that wound round the gnarled elm tree, sunshine leaping down in golden drops on the pale windflowers and the sweet-scented woodruff that grew among the moss, sunshine glistening in and out of the green fern leaves, sunshine glancing from the birch trees' shining stems—sunshine everywhere.

Only it was so still, — so absolutely still. The wind ceased to sweep up the long overarching aisles; the leaves hung fixed and motionless from their thousand branching sprays; the little sparrow that had swung to and fro on the pink thorn close beside them hushed its saucy chirp and looked at them with its bright black eyes; the old fir trees stayed their whispering voices, and over all that spring beauty there seemed to have come a strange waiting silence, while they two stood side by side, thinking such thoughts as come but once in a lifetime.

Stephen could not bear that hush, and he said it again,—“Maud, I love you very much—do you love me?”

“Yes.”

“And will you always love me, and be my own true wife?”

“I’ll try.”

The leaves began to flutter again, the wind swept musically over them; the dark fir trees spake one another friendly in their old world whispers; the green ferns shook and danced in the sunlight; the sparrow flung himself up to the topmost bough of the elm tree, and chirped out more merrily than ever; myriad hushed voices started into melody again, sweeping up and down the cloistered wood. Then he took her hand, prayer-book, flowers, and all, holding it fast under his strong arm, and without further word or speech, Stephen Roden and Maud — no longer twain but one — went on to evening service at Braeton church.

CHAPTER X.

Braeton, July. — Papa and I are going to Scarborough to-morrow morning. I wonder what sort of a place it is? Anyhow, one thing is sure, it can't be worse than this. But I am trying now to be independent of these sorts of things, to live on my own quiet self-contained life, and let the dull, stupid, commonplace world wag along as it pleases. By living much in the midst of an uncultivated set of people, with neither intellectual nor literary society, nor anything to ruffle the stagnant waters of daily petty duties and belongings, one gets crusted over soon with a merciful growth of indifference, a pleasant thick soft green moss of apathy, which keeps you from being anyway bruised by the rough angles of the life which goes on around you.

Not that this is altogether a healthy state of

feeling. It does not exactly come up to my ideas of that "sober, righteous, and godly life," which we profess to seek after every Sunday morning at church; and I do often feel a compunctious twinge when, in the last prayer but one of the service, the clergyman speaks of "giving up ourselves"—a thing I have certainly never done yet. But, nevertheless, so it is. Gradually my life draws more and more within the limits of our own little circle. All my hopes nestle down there; and if ever my gratitude warms to an extent worth mentioning, it is when I think about my sister Maud.

She won't miss me much when I go away. I can't get that thought out of my mind, that she will never again be to me what she has been. I try to fight against it, but it always comes back.

She has been very busy this evening, trimming me up a brown hat for the sea-side. In the midst of the process, Stephen Roden came in. She went on with her work just the same, and he stood in the window watching her little fingers as they flickered backwards and forwards. Maud has such pretty fingers, I often look at them myself. When she is at work they twinkle about so gracefully, and when she is at rest, listening to

Stephen reading, or sitting thinking, as she often does now in the hours between the lights, they lie folded in such beautiful, sweet repose. There is so much character in the position of Maud's hands when she is thinking, such utter rest and quietness. What a wee little wedding ring she will want when she gets married.

As I said before, Maud will not miss me so much now, though we have never been parted from each other for even a week before. It is strange how soon one gets accustomed to anything which at first seemed very painful. They have only been engaged a few weeks, and yet it seems as natural as possible that he should be coming in of an evening now, just as if he belonged to the family—as indeed he does in a sort of way.

I wonder if Maud loves him very much—if he is absolutely everything to her—if he fills up *all* her thoughts, and makes her very life, as I think *my* Stephen Roden will, that is, if I ever find him. For she does not seem one bit altered, except that there is the very slightest shade of dignity about her, the sort of dignity one might feel in holding some great possession; and when she speaks of him, which is very seldom, there is a touch of proud pleasure in her voice. For the

rest, she goes on just as usual, looking after all her little duties about the house with the same quietness and regularity, going to see her old pensioners in the village, and writing out stories for her class at the Sunday school. I think I could not do so. I think if I held such a jewel as Maud does, I should do nothing but gaze on it day and night, wondering at its great beauty, until all else had faded and grown dim. It would be my all, my very life and soul.

I said as much as this to Maud the other night, as we sat together at the dining-room window, and told her I wondered how she could plod so quietly and steadily on through each day's duties, while such a light as this lay upon her future. She did not answer me for a little while, and then said only that single verse of George Herbert's:—

“The man that looks on glass, on it may stay his eye;
Or, if he pleaseth, through it pass, and then the heavens spy.”

And then it seemed to me that I saw such a strange new beauty in her face, such a far-away earnest look in those quiet grey eyes of hers. Perhaps there is something after all in Maud's character that I have never yet thought of, that I could not fathom if I would. Perhaps her love

is like her religion, so entirely woven through and through with her whole heart and life, that she need not take herself apart from other duties to realise it — it is always there, always brightening, always purifying. Ah, Maud, in this as in many other things, you are far nobler than I am!

I like Stephen Roden. I like him better and better as I know him more. What a real, strong, thorough nature there is under that rough outside of his.

I think he is just like one of those grand old Scottish mountains I have read about, streaked with rugged rifts and crags, and pine woods, yet with delicate little mosses and blue harebells springing up where the sunshine comes.

Miss Gabbatis does not appreciate this simile, and thinks he is not like a Scottish mountain at all. I believe I admire him more because he is so thoroughly unlike any one I have ever seen before. Now the people I meet at the Braeton and Marbrook parties either talk the veriest nonsense about the pretty polkas the barrack band played last flower show, or the new song that has just come out, or they tell me how well the dress I happen to wear suits my complexion, and how exceeding pretty the flowers look in my hair,

with divers other equally interesting and original remarks; or, if they chance to be of the intellectual sort, bore me to death with small talk on literary subjects, and laborious criticisms on some new book that has just come out. Now Stephen Roden does nothing of the sort. I don't think he could put a compliment together if he tried. I have never heard him make what is called a pretty speech, even to Maud herself; and I should think, in a circle of fascinating young ladies at an evening party, he would be the veriest fish out of water that any one could imagine. Still less does he hamper one's comprehension with literary dissertations. I can't remember that he ever asked my opinion of a book since I knew him. He deals with facts rather than fancies, and finds poetry for himself in real life and nature, instead of reading it second hand from others. I have seen him come in with such a bright earnest face to tell Maud of a new wildflower he had seen, or of a fresh "feeling," as he called it, that he had got of some particular glade or woodland bit, or to show her some beautifully-tinted leaf that he had found. And then how he notices everything in nature — the varying shades of the sky, the motion of the clouds, the characteristic

fall and disposition of foliage, the different sound of the wind in passing over certain trees, the ever-varying effects of atmosphere on the distant woods and reaches of moorland, and numberless other little things, which show that he has lived much alone with nature, and learned to speak with her as one would with a friend.

I should think his is a very *objective* mind, the most so of any with which I have ever come in contact; one disposed rather to look outward upon all things that are beautiful, and honest, and true, and to bring the impression of these into his inner life, than to brood upon that inner life as a separate thing, to study its workings with a morbid search for faults, and to look at all things without through this distorted medium of self-consciousness. The other night, just for the fun of the thing, I asked him to read a page or two for us out of "Psychological Musings," a vehemently subjective poem, which has made its appearance lately, and was sent to me by one of my ultra-emotional acquaintances at Marbrook. I was so amused by the expression of utter bewilderment that came up over his massive countenance as he read through those long-drawn rhapsodies about the "over soul," "mystic voices of nature,"

“spirit utterances,” “longings after the infinite,” until he laid down the book, saying he did not quite comprehend it, and asked Maud to play him the “March of the Cameron Men,” to ventilate his feelings. I asked him afterwards what he thought about it, and his answer was very characteristic.

“Why,” he said, “I should just like to set it wide open, and throw it up into the air, as far as I could reach, some fine bright summer day, to let it get a little sunshine and fresh air into it, for it gives one a feeling of suffocation.”

A very just criticism : better than most of the Reviews have propounded upon this said book. Thought of any kind in these days seems to be good for nothing, unless it is smothered in a wet blanket of morbid phrases. I sometimes think our whole literary population would be vastly the better of a vigorous toss up into the sunshine of common sense.

Stephen loves Maud very much. The whole of his great broad free nature shines out upon her. He has no one else to love, no father, no mother, no sister, so he belongs to her entirely. I wonder how it feels to be loved like that? But I must go now and look after my packing, for we start

early to-morrow morning. What sort of a place will this Scarbro' be, I wonder? Papa does not like the thought of private lodgings, so I suppose we shall go into an hotel or something of that sort, where I shall have a chance of seeing a little life. But why need I wish to see more of what has wearied me so much already? I shall take "Foster" with me, and a good supply of work; and with these and a due modicum of constitutional rambles, one may hope to get through three weeks of even any sort of life. Don't let me forget to put this diary in at the top of my trunk.

To-morrow night at this time we shall be there.

CHAPTER XI.

Scarbro', North-shore, July. — We came here nearly a fortnight ago. For the first week we were on the South Cliff, but it was too exciting for Papa, and he didn't like it; neither did I. Thank goodness that, with all my faults, I have still a little bit of taste left for what is simple and natural. Why, there, the very foam on the waves seems to curl itself for the sake of effect, and the breezes, be they land or sea, smell of nothing but Frangipani and Millefleurs, and I do believe the heath on the moors behind the Crescent blooms in purple this year because it is the fashionable court colour. Then you couldn't go for a quiet saunter in the Cliff gardens, or a turn on the Spa promenade, without being half smothered and suffocated with hats of all shapes and sizes, hoops, crinoline, parasols, feathers, and finery. And as

for the gentlemen—who is it says gentlemen are not fond of dress? Some one who never went to Scarbro', I'll venture to say. Verily, I never imagined there had been a tithe of the variety in male costume that I saw in an hour's walk on that promenade. Such extinguishing vests, and fancy ties, and extensive plaids, and gigantic buttons, and unrecognisable things that are meant to be hats! No, no, save me from ever staying another week on the South Cliff in the Scarbro' season. So three days ago we came here to this pleasant house on the north shore, where we can live a little more like rational beings.

I like to sit here at my bed-room window, listening to the monotonous beat of the waves on the sands below. Not that it is monotonous to me though, for I never saw the sea before, and everything about it is fresh and new. That grand hoary old Castle too, keeping guard there over the cliff!

They say Cromwell fired upon it from Oliver's Mount, a round hill on the other side of the town, and that Robin Hood and his merry men used to come and hold their festal days within its crumbling walls; likely enough. There to my left the cliffs wind round in a grand sweeping line, head-

land after headland, stretching away into the distance, till they melt in a faint blue haze, which I cannot distinguish from the sea itself. I was down on the rocks yesterday, at low water, gathering sea weeds; how different they look floating about in those clear transparent pools to the faded, washed-out, dried-up specimens of them one sees pricked out on cardboard for bazaars and young ladies' portfolios! Just as much difference as there is between Maud—my sister Maud, with her innocent ways and bright spring morning freshness—and these artificial young ladies, all ringlets and jewellery and chenille nets, that I dine with every day in the room below.

Yes, everything is very fresh to me who never saw anything out of the little village of Braeton and the stupid old abbey town of Marbrook. And yet I wish sometimes that Papa was well, so that we could pack up and go home again. It is rather dreary sitting here alone while he saunters up and down with the gentlemen on the cliff, and for the life of me I can't find any satisfaction in the ladies' drawing-room, where they do nothing but work muslin work, and talk about the pretty dresses they have seen in the Spa gardens. I don't know either how to employ myself. Just

the old sort of feeling that I used to have at home, and that I suppose I shall have everywhere. Maud wouldn't say this; she would find out some way of doing good if she were here. She would hunt up two or three poor old women to go and read to, or some little children to teach, or some invalid lady to be of use to; or she would go and talk to the idle sailors and bathing women on the sands; or—but, anyhow, the last thing my sister Maud would ever do would be to sit here as I am sitting just now, and say she had nothing to do.

No, I will not go into the ladies' drawing-room; anything but that. I think I will set to and write a description of the people that are here, and perhaps it will amuse Maud to read it when we get back.

First then on the list, just as if we did not see enough of them every time we pass Ceylon House, in the market-place at Marbrook, comes portly Mrs. Sharrup, with her two daughters, Miss Phebe and Miss Julia; Rachel, the best of the trio, being left at home to assist in the house-keeping, I presume. Miss Phebe, as I gathered from sundry observations the first day we came, needed "bracing," so was brought here to be put

through the operation, which, so far as I am able to judge, consists in lacing herself to the extremest verge of possibility, drinking a wineglassful of spa-water at eleven o'clock in the morning, consuming the smallest appreciable amount of honest, wholesome animal food, and the largest ditto of creams, ices, confectionery, &c., followed by an afternoon's lounge on the softest sofa she can find, and a full-dress stroll on the promenade in the evening. I hope the process will be attended with a favourable result. If she could be "braced" morally and intellectually as well as physically, it would be an immense acquisition to her. Next in order to them, for all here who live in the public rooms take their places according to the length of time they have been in the establishment, comes a stout old dowager of sixty, who dresses in *moire antique*, wears a great many flowers in her cap, and goes about like a ship in full sail. Then comes Mrs. Ponde, a tall, grave, quiet, aristocratic woman, who seldom joins in conversation, and evidently thinks the whole concern a bore. She lives at a place in the north called the Marshes, and seems to be one of the upper-class sort of people. Her daughter Isabella, who has come with her, is a walking magazine of wit and

merriment, a perfect bundle of good nature and animal spirits, and a marvellous hand at keeping the ball of conversation going. She tells me she gets moped to death at the Marshes, which, considering her temperament, is likely enough, and can't exist without six weeks at the coast, and a month in London every year, by way of getting herself stirred up. Then, next to her, come the Miss Scrambles, two very fast young ladies who wear their hair parted on one side, sport stiff white turn-down collars and Joinville ties, patronise incipient Wellington boots, and never seem so happy as when they are buttoned up to the throat in riding-habits, and careering along over the south sands at the rate of ten miles an hour. Moreover, they talk politics, revile the duty on cigars, and criticise the horses and traps that go past the windows; so that, on the whole, I think Nature has made a slight mistake in placing them among the ladies of creation. Besides these, there are one or two more who have no very special points of individuality about them. I think, altogether, we have nearly a dozen ladies, from the sexagenarian dowager in black lace and moire antique, down to a little chit of twelve who sits

next me at dinner, and eats a fabulous quantity of tarts and cheesecakes.

I stopped here a long time, as I often do when I am reading or writing at this room window, to listen to the low, even, unbroken voice of the sea, and to watch the little white crests of foam dipping and reappearing among the ripples, or dancing merrily round the brown-sailed fishing boats. How often at home I have read that line of Keble's,—

“ The many-twinkling smile of ocean,” —

but never knew what it meant until I came here and saw it for myself, and listened to that bright, soft, always changing, uneven motion. The sea has never been anything else but calm yet; either babbling that incessant laughter under sunshine and blue sky, or else lying spread out in still grey-like beauty for the moon to look down upon. I sometimes think I should like to see a storm, to hear the floods lift up their voices while deep calleth unto deep; to behold Nature in her grand and terrible moods instead of this playful basking smile. If we stay here a fortnight longer, as papa talks of doing, I may perhaps be gratified.

Yonder is Miss Malvina Scramble, marching down the Castle rock. I should know that scarlet

plume half a mile away, and that buff nankeen paletot, shaped out for all the world just like the study-coat papa wears at home. I suppose she has been having a "constitutional," as she calls it, no one knows how far into the country. And just below the windows here, sauntering gracefully up the promenade, comes Miss Sharrup, with a book in her hand, poetry no doubt, and Mr. Golden Brown at her side. Wasn't I going to make a list of our company masculine? He shall be first.

He was making a tour on the continent some few weeks ago, and, being somewhat proud thereof, favoured us with a sight of his passport. I may as well copy the description given there of his outer man, as it will save me the trouble of extemporising another.

"Mr. Golden Brown, aged twenty-one, height five feet six inches, slender figure, light hair, fair complexion, blue eyes." Added to this, I may say that he wears an eye-glass suspended by a hair chain, has photographic portraits on his studs, patronises Longfellow and Byron, talks about his "Ma," and finally manifests a strong penchant for the society of Miss Phebe Sharrup. There, Mr. Golden Brown, you can step down and make room for some one else. Mr. Stanley is nephew to the

dowager in *moire antique*. He claims to be intellectual, and I thought he was so, until yesterday he asked me for the loan of my copy of Foster's Life, which he had never seen before, and returned it within an hour, saying he had finished it, and did not care to see the second volume; whereupon my opinion of his intellect sank below zero, and has not risen since. He talks profoundly of Maurice's Essays, Carlyle's Works, &c., and is made up of facts, nothing else. I don't discern a touch of real original life in him. Mr. Grey comes next: I believe he is a congregational minister—a quiet, thoughtful, gentlemanly man. Papa and he get along very well together, talking about the Puritan divines and Greek fathers. He has come here in search of health, and I hope he will find it, for there is something about him that will do good in the world. We have also two youths from college, preparing for the Church forsooth. Their conversation runs chiefly on Oxford pranks and ladies' dresses, with a quotation here and there, *not* from the Fathers, I should say. Blessings on the congregation, wheresoever situated, of which they shall be the spiritual pastors and masters. Now could I kneel and meekly receive the apostolic benediction from either of these two, with the

slightest confidence that I should be in any way a gainer thereby; or could I listen with the smallest sprinkling of humility and gratitude, while they poured out over me an absolution for sins not a tenth part the magnitude of their own? I must have a long talk with papa about this some day.

Here are two more—brothers, I believe, or perhaps cousins, for they are not much alike in features—of the sort commonly denominated “fussy,” wearing an extensive assortment of jewellery, striking novelties in the way of vests, ties, collars, &c., and cultivating that style of deportment which *Punch* calls “sketchy.” There, I believe I have gone through the list.

Maud, my humble, trustful little sister Maud, sitting just now perhaps under the great old beech-tree at the bottom of our garden; looking with those upturned, reverent eyes of yours into Stephen Roden’s face, listening, as we do to some great and noble spirit, for every word he speaks: you think I might be somewhat more charitable, do you not, in my remarks upon the lordly sex? Perhaps in distant drawing-rooms that I know not of, and in soft silken-curtained boudoirs, some innocent girl dreams over one of these college youths, and sees him in her maiden fancy trans-

figured into a man, a something to be loved and looked up to; and another longs for the day which shall bring back our "sketchy" friend to her loving eyes; and another builds up round that shallow intellectualist all her wealth of hope and reverence. More the pity for them! Be thankful for Stephen Roden, Maud, every thought and fibre and feeling of him true. Perhaps some day you will feel him truer still by contrast with such as these.

I can't help saying it again. What a new life this is for me to be launched into! I who have never seen any "society" beyond a stray individual or two who saunters up our garden walk at Braeton, and whose utmost experience of life is derived from a day's shopping or visiting at Marbrook. Not altogether pleasant though; these new scenes and characters puzzle me so. What a world it is, taking as a specimen this house where we live! How few noble spirits it contains—how few with whom one could care to go beneath the merest surface of common-place, chit-chat life! Yes, on the whole, setting aside Papa and Mr. Grey, I can say, as I look round the well-filled dining-table every day, Mabel Harcourt, be thankful that you are a maiden lady.

A maiden lady! True, and in five years more

I shall be an old maid, for I suppose I shall never marry now. I once used to think I should, it being the ordinary lot of womankind; but I have never seen anybody yet whom I could promise to love, honour, and obey. Stephen Roden perhaps comes nearest, but he is not intellectual enough for me; I could give my homage to none but a prince in the world of mind — some one who would tower head and shoulders above the common herd, and lift me up to him, and make me proud of him—oh! how proud.

What a burst of laughter from the drawing-room below! That's Isabella Ponde's voice, I am sure. How it would weary me to live with that girl! She is just a magazine of laughing-gas — a veritable will-o'-the-wisp—own sister to those that dance and flutter about in her native "Marshes." She wants repose. I can't bear people who are always on the stretch for effect, and striving to say witty things. No, give me quiet dignity, serene self-containment, in outward deportment at least, whatever lies within; such as her mother possesses, or, perhaps I might say, —myself. Let me see, what was I talking about when she interrupted me? Oh! I remember—old maids and the probability of my becoming one.

And yet somehow I don't quite like the thought of living on to the end of my 'days in single blessedness. It is well enough now that we are all snug and cosy together, but when Maud marries and goes away, and when, as long years roll on, papa and mamma grow infirm, and then die and leave me alone, quite alone, and I wander about the house at Braeton thinking of the days that are no more; and then when I too grow old, a grey-haired, spectacled old maid, with nothing to do but prose through the blank dreary volumes of memory, and stand godmother to possible nieces and nephews — but what have the future and I to do with each other? Let me leave it to take care of itself, and think of the now. How little we ever think of that! It is always past or coming time in which we live. Even Maud, my quiet, active little sister Maud,— it is not the present, with its round of employments, she is thinking of when she sits within our dining-room window, telegraphing over seam after seam of plain work, yet resting from time to time and gazing out over the long purple reaches of the Downshire hills, with that far, far seeing look in her eyes, and that busy smile creeping up over her face.

Maud, how often I long for you—to have you about me with your nice, fresh, cheery ways, and to walk, not alone, but with you, over those long golden sands which stretch far down below me! My little sister, the wild blue hyacinths that carpet our own wood at Braeton in May are not more wide apart from those feather-tulips that Mrs. Sharrup wears in her best cap on Sundays, than are you in all your innocent freshness from these peripatetic pyramids of muslin, lace, and streamers, called young ladies, which assemble day by day in this dining-room of ours. N.B.—I don't mean to read this paragraph to you, lady Maud, when I come back, for though you have about as little conceit as any mortal I ever came across, yet I would not answer for the effect of such a flattering comparison from the pen of your usually silent sister. And yet what nonsense I am talking! Does not Stephen Roden tell you the same things over, and over again fifty times a day, or at least *look* them, which, as I take it, is much the same thing, seeing that by this time you must have learned to understand every meaning of those honest grey eyes? Ah! Maud, you are very happy. I wonder if I shall ever be so. I wonder if I shall walk side by side through life

with one who will call me "Mabel" as he calls you "Maud." If I had such a future as yours—if I were to any one what you are—if either memory or hope could ever bring upon my face that absolutely restful expression I so often see upon yours! I know people call me stylish; they say I am a queenly girl, and papa is very proud of me—I have felt that for long enough. I can silence those uppish young sparks at Marbrook with a single glance, and extinguish them for the rest of the evening. I have done it over and over again; and people never dare be familiar with me, or talk nonsense to me, or bore me with those soft nothings that seem to supply the place of conversation to half the young ladies I meet. But this doesn't do—it isn't enough. I want more than respect, more than deference, more than admiration; I want to give as well as to receive. I want some one to whom I could render more—a thousand times more—than all that has ever been offered to me—some one who would——

Stop, don't let me write any more. I shall be saying more than I think if I don't mind. It's time I shut up my desk now, and set off with papa to get his regular drink of spa-water.

CHAPTER XII.

“AND so Miss Mabel has gone with her papa to the sea side, and won’t be back this fortnight? Dearie me, now, to think that I should have let her go away, and never so much as come to say good-bye to her. Only, you see, I did not exactly know the day to a nicety; not but what I had heard about it beforehand; for you know my little maid is third cousin, or very nearly that, to the young man that pays his addresses to Miss Fenton’s apprentice; and I heard some word in a round-about sort of way about a couple of buff dresses, with white braided Marcella jackets, that were to have been sent home to Miss Mabel a fortnight ago, to say nothing of a sea-side parasol that I saw coming to the house in a parcel; so you see I may say I was in a manner forewarned, and I really should have come to pay my parting re-

spects to dear Miss Mabel, and wish her every happiness, only you see, I've been so busy I didn't know where to put myself; what with attending to the kittens—for really my tortoiseshell cat is always increasing her family—and weeding that patch of turnips in front of the back sitting-room window, and looking round in a general way to keep things ship-shape, I haven't had a minute to call my own, I don't know when. You see it makes a difference when one hasn't a gentleman to fall back upon. It's a useful thing in a house is a gentleman, as I've always said since I lived with my dear brother before he got his professorship, though they do make trouble in the shape of shirt-buttons and hot mutton chops."

And here Miss Gabbatis looked round the room for a place to deposit her umbrella, and then collapsed into Maud's little low chair by the window.

"Thank you, Miss Maud, it's very kind of you to put me here. I always say this chair of yours is the very best invention that was ever made, it does accommodate itself so practically to the physiological peculiarities of one's system, and must be such a convenient seat when one is nursing—kittens, I mean. I'm sure I got such a pain in the small of my back this morning, with just

nothing at all but sitting bolt upright in that great arm-chair of my father's, bless him, and nursing two of my kittens. You see, poor little things, they had fallen asleep in my lap, and I couldn't find it in my heart to wake them, they looked so bonnie, purring away with their little eyes shut, and their tails curled up round their noses. Not that it was at all convenient to me to have them lying there though, for I had made up my mind to step down and have a chat with Miss Nunly, and the dinner wanted seeing to, and that reminds me, Miss Maud—*would* you be so kind as take those two or three sprigs of mint that I brought with me, and put them into water until I go home. I begged them at the gardener's on my way, for I'm going to have a bit of roast lamb to-morrow, and they'll come in handy for sauce. Well, then, you know when I set them down at last, and got up, I'd such a pain in my back as never was."

"It might be a touch of rheumatism," suggested Maud.

"Rheumatism, my dear young lady!" and Miss Gabbatis jumped up out of the easy chair as if she, as well as it, had been hung on springs; "don't mention such a thing, or you'll distress me, you will indeed. We never had a touch of

rheumatism in our family, except a great uncle of mine on my father's side, who was once travelling in the Highlands, and got put to sleep in a sky parlour, where the rain came in through the thatch, which has made me very nervous about wet ever since ; and I have always made a point of creeping into my cottage roof myself, after a shower of rain, and tapping the slates separately to see that they are all fast. It's such a thing, you know, is rheumatism. Sally stands with her foot on the door to keep it from blowing to, for you see it only opens on one side, and if I happened to get shut in it would be rather awkward, especially as I can't shout very loud at my time of life, and Sally is disposed to be deaf rather, whenever she gets a bit of cold."

"You must have had a great many journeys into your cottage roof lately, Miss Gabbatis, as the weather has been so showery," observed Mrs. Harcourt, with an undertone of amusement in her voice. She had laid aside her book when Miss G. came in, and was mending some fine old lace work, which had belonged to her mother. Mrs. Harcourt was very fond of doing anything that required accuracy and delicacy. As is the case with many people who have lived a long life of

retirement and ill health, she had acquired a great fineness of touch in all the delicate little arts of feminine handicraft, and loved to employ her many hours of spare time in embroidering dainty fabrics which vied with old English point and Venetian lace in their richness and exquisite design. A great deal of this delicate facility Maud had inherited from her.

“Why, yes,” said Miss Gabbatis, “I can’t say but what I have had a pretty good deal of running up and down stairs, and I got rather tired of it sometimes; but, you know, I’d rather spend half my time in tapping my slates to see if there are any loose ones, than neglect them an odd time after a shower, and have the water coming into my best spare bed-room with the blue hangings, and running the risk of rheumatism. Besides rheumatism’s such an expensive thing. I’m sure that poor dear uncle of mine, bless him, spent pounds and pounds, if he spent a penny, on scarlet flannel, and brown paper, and different sorts of specifics, and for a person of my means that would not be convenient. Then, you know, Mrs. Harcourt, I always make a point of attending to it myself.”

“That is just what amuses me; why could not Sally manage it?”

“Why, you see,” and here Miss Gabbatis took out her netting, and gave herself a general sort of shaking down in the easy chair, as if she had got a good deal to say and wanted to make herself comfortable whilst she was saying it. “The fact is, I once had a rather unpleasant occurrence took place by account of some one else going into that roof instead of myself. I never mentioned it to you before, because I was afraid it might injure the poor woman’s character and prospects, but it gave me quite a turn at the time, it did indeed.

“It was about a year ago, as near as I can remember, *just* a year, for I always make a point of having the whitewashers the day before my poor dear father’s birth-day, bless him, and then I get everything nice and tidy, ready for thinking about him, on the 30th of July; and I had been having the front parlour cleaned out—it’s rather troublesome getting that parlour cleaned, for the furniture is so heavy; why, that square piano that my oldest godmother left me, takes three people to move it, because you see I’ve had the wires pulled out, and use it to keep preserve pots and such things in; and the bureau too, with my dear

father's books, is a good weight, to say nothing of the great table with such lots of flaps and drawers; so I was obliged to have a charwoman, a thing I've a great objection to, on account of their appetite. I'm always obliged to go round the pantry before they come, and take an inventory of everything, they do make away with loaf ends and odd pieces of pie so. Well, I sent for Mrs. Gosler to come — the same I've had ever since I began housekeeping, and we had just got the things nicely out of the way, and she was on her hands and knees scouring the floor, when there came on a tremendous shower. I don't know if you remember it, Mrs. Harcourt, it laid nearly all Sir Everard's wheat as flat as a pancake. It happened that I was up at the top of the steps washing the paint, and you know it isn't the easiest thing in the world for a person at my time of life to come down a ladder in a bustle, so I shouted to Mrs. Gosler to run upstairs and tap the slates to see if they were sound.

“Well, up she went, but I don't think she'd been gone five minutes before I heard her shouting loud enough to bring the roof off, slates and all, and making such skreels and puffs as you never heard in your life. I was sure something dreadful

was the matter. Down I came off the steps, making a great slit in my gown, and upstairs with Sally after me, and there was fat Mrs. Gosler with her shoulders stuck fast in the roof door, so fast that she couldn't move either back or forward, and skreeing out just like that parrot of yours when Joan teases him.

"Well, Sally and I began to push at her, for we thought if we could once get her pushed in, she might give a twist sideways and come out that way, but we might as well have tried to move a hay stack. It wasn't a bit of use, and she kept on skreeing all the time, and puffing in a way that made my nerves shake again."

Miss Gabbatis was becoming excited with her narrative, and had given her bonnet a twitch to one side; she had also made a pleasing variation in the legitimate uses of her working implements, and illustrated the subject by vigorous manipulations of her netting needle and mesh as occasion seemed to require.

"At last we saw pushing wouldn't answer, so Sally and I went behind and took hold of her petticoats, one on each side, and we set to and pulled as hard as we could, to see if we could move her in another direction, but she just stuck

as fast as ever, though I declare I made my wrists ache again. Sally laughed, she said it would have made a cat laugh to see her wedged in in that way ; but I'm sure I felt quite humiliated. It was such a position for an educated female to be placed in,—especially one who has connections in the church,—pulling Mrs. Gosler out of a roof door in that way. I think if it had been any of my own relations who had brought themselves into such a situation, I should not have been so much affected ; but the Gabbatises have always been a remarkably spare family, so that such a thing couldn't have happened among us. I remember, my poor dear father, bless him, was the only man in the parish who could get through that new turnstile which Sir Everard put up on the Park road, and he was obliged to take his own gown with him wherever he went to preach, for everybody else's hung about him like a bag.

“ Well, the long and short of it was we *could* not get her out ; and do you know, Mrs. Harcourt, I began to be afraid there would be nothing for it but leaving her stuck there until she got thin enough to be pulled back again. So Sally and I stood looking at each other, and she went on puffing and skreeing, and the front parlour was at a

dead stand-still; and the rain clattered down at such a rate I was quite sure it would have got into the best bedroom long ago. At last I said, 'Sally, just you run up the village, and fetch the carpenter to beat out the door posts.' You know, it's only a little low door, and she had had to go down on her hands and knees to get into it at all. 'And Sally,' I said, 'as you can't often find your things in a hurry, you had better just slip on Mrs. Gosler's bonnet and shawl that's hung up in the back passage.'

"But, would you believe it, as soon as ever I mentioned the bonnet to Sally, the woman gave herself a great wrench and came out all right, looking never a bit worse, but only rather red in the face; and instead of stopping to thank me, as I expected, for the trouble I had taken in pulling and pushing her, she went tumbling down stairs as fast as she could go after my maid, and cried out, 'Sally, whatever you do, don't go and tell the carpenter, or I shall never hear the last of it.' So Sally didn't go."

"And you got safely out of the scrape, Miss Gabbatis?"

"No, Miss Maud, I'm sorry to say that wasn't the end of it. You know, when I came to think it over, I didn't feel quite right about her being in

such a stew when I told Sally to slip *her* bonnet on. I was sure there must be something wrong; so I left them to their cleaning, and went into the back parlour to meditate upon it; for I was quite sure Mrs. Gosler's bonnet wasn't so smart but what Sally might have run down the village in it on a pinch; indeed, it was an old black silk thing of mine that I had fifteen years ago, when my dear brother died, and it had got as brown as a buffalo with being rained, and hailed, and snowed upon. After a little reflection, I thought it my duty to slip into the passage to the peg where Mrs. Gosler hangs her things up, and see the state of the case, and what do you think I found inside it?"

"Nothing more than the head-lining, I hope, and the cap—not very clean, perhaps, either of them."

"Mrs. Harcourt!" and Miss Gabbatis looked very solemn, and leaned forward with her mesh and netting needle held spear-fashion in one hand, while the other was stretched out appealingly to her audience; "it's too serious to be joked about. As sure as my name is Deborah Gabbatis, I found half a veal pie that I had bought only the day before, and one of my own home-made currant tarts — there!"

“But are you sure the tart was yours? You know she might have bought it for her supper, and the pie too.”

“Oh, Miss Maud, it’s just like you to be so charitable. You’re always ready to help a lame dog over a stile, and to cast the mantle of innocence over reprobate charwomen; but it *was* my tart, indeed it was. My tarts have as definite an idiosyncrasy as any human being that was ever born in the world. I should know them at the antipodes, if ever they travelled so far; or among thousands and thousands of others at the refreshment stall in the Crystal Palace, just as well as I should recognise my brother Peter among all the other professors at Cambridge; notched round, you know, with a pattern that I designed myself, and got done at the tinner’s, and stuck over with little leaves the size of a threepenny piece, and a peculiar shaped hole in the middle for the syrup to boil out of; and it so happened that this one had risen a little to one side in the baking, and I thought, as it didn’t look exactly nice for the parlour, though the inside was just as good, I would take it to Betty Haye’s next time I went to see her. And as to the other, the veal pie, Miss Maud, I could have sworn to it in a court of justice, for

the top crust had shelled up and let some of the gravy come out, in consequence of which the pieman let me have it for a penny less. Oh, the immorality of charwomen, Mrs. Harcourt; it really is something fearful! However, I said nothing about it, and left it there, as of course it wasn't fit to eat, or even to give to Betty Haye, after it had been in Mrs. Gosler's bonnet crown; but when I paid her that night I told her, with as much dignity as I could command, that I thought I should not require her services any more. She mumbled something about her master, I suppose she meant her husband, liking a bit of pastry times about for his supper; but I did not wish to bring the subject up again. Whenever I meet her now in the village, she pokes off into some passage or by place or other, or pretends to be looking very hard into a shop window. Of course, I don't bear her any ill-will about it, nor ever did, but I assure you, the whole affair gave me quite a turn—it did, indeed. And now, Miss Maud, if you'll be so kind as to bring me that mint again, I think I'll be going."

"You may as well take off your bonnet, Miss Gabbatis, and stay tea. You know we're a very small family just now; and a little company

makes a change," said Mrs. Harcourt, still busy with her lace work; holding it up to the light to discern any fresh rents or thin places in the beautiful tracery of leaves, and tendrils, and flowers. Mrs. Harcourt's mother had worn that lace when she was married—so had she; and since then all the children had worn it at their christenings; and Maud was to wear it at her wedding, whenever that should be. So that it had come to be filled with old memories and associations, clustering thick upon every delicate spray, and springing out, as the mother turned it over and over in her thin fingers, from every thread of its soft web-like folds. And the pleasant little narrative of Miss Gabbatis had no way disturbed the under-current of thought-life which belonged to the work, any more than a merry tuneful piece of dance music can break or overpower some set train of habitual feeling—it only touches it here and there, without dispersing it.

"Thank you, Mrs. Harcourt; as you're so kind as to ask me, I think I will stay, though I haven't come provided with a clean collar; but perhaps, Miss Maud, you could lend me one; a nice plain one, you know, dear, such as I've seen you wear in a morning; and please remind me when I go

away that I don't take it with me, for I've got such a dreadful memory for those sorts of little things;" and Miss Gabbatis, too honest to need further pressing, or to affect a score of unnecessary excuses, took her netting out of her pocket again, and proceeded to disrobe in the same orderly methodical manner that has been described on a former occasion.

"I always make a point of staying to tea, if anybody asks me," said she, when she had smoothed her thin grey ringlets with one of her sidecombs, and stroked down her brown alpaca dress, and made a few other little womanly attempts at personal adornment; "especially any one I have known so long and respect so much as yourself, Mrs. Harcourt. It's rather lonely sitting in that little back parlour of mine in an evening; and I've said to myself, over and over again, when the kittens were fast asleep and all the work done, that I never was cut out for a single woman; it don't seem to suit my line at all, for you know I rather like a little bit of talk now and then; and I do think, though it's myself that says it, that I should have made a nice chatty wife for anybody that was partial to society, and not particular about personal appearance. Only, somehow or other,

the right person never seemed to turn up ;” and Miss Gabbatis gave a little sort of quick breath, that was intended to have been a sigh, but changed its mind before it got quite so far as that, and ran itself out into a few general remarks.

“ Besides, Mrs. Harcourt, it’s quite a charity to ask me this afternoon, for Sally’s gone out for her monthly holiday, and as I wasn’t quite sure whether I should be in or not, I didn’t order any fresh bread ; so, as likely as anything, if I was to go home just now, I should find the fire dead out and nothing but the crust end of a loaf in the house. I always say that’s one comfort of being an old maid, you can let your fire go out whenever you’ve a mind to, and nobody’s any business to lecture you about it. My dear father, bless him, used to say, ‘ there’s never a hill without a dale ;’ and I might have poked about in the world a good while, and done no better for myself than Providence has done for me.”

Meanwhile Joan came in, and laid the cloth for tea.

Very pretty the tea table always looked at Braeton Lodge. The rich crimson drapery, the snow-white china, the silver urn and cream ewer so bright and sparkling, the vase of fresh

flowers, with which, throughout spring, summer, and autumn, Maud always furnished the centre. The sun shone in warmly and lovingly through the open window, flitting among the thick leafy branches of the old beech tree at the corner of the orchard, and over the trellised garden walk, along which only an hour hence Stephen Roden would come. Was it the thought of this which made Maud's face so bright, and kindled that beam of content in her soft grey eyes, and filled all her girlish ways with a fresh expectant grace?

Quiet little Maud, peaceful little Maud, live on so until the end comes, and that step is heard no more upon the walk; and after that live on still quietly, still peacefully, if you can.

"Now this *is* what I call comfortable," said Miss Gabbatis, when the trio had gathered round the table, and little wreaths of fragrant steam were curling from their respective cups; "I always enjoy my tea so, especially when I have a nice little bit of company to talk to between whiles; and then, Mrs. Harcourt, I don't know how it is, but your tea always tastes so nice; perhaps you get it wholesale from London, as Mr. Harcourt has a brother a merchant? Ah! I thought so, that makes all the difference;

but, you see, it's awkward for us maiden ladies, who have nothing but church connections, and are forced to be dependent on the nearest grocer's shop, not that I mean any disrespect to Mr. Shar-rup, but you know it isn't always just the very thing one could wish. The fact is, Mrs. Harcourt,"—and here Miss Gabbatis stopped to take a bit of muffin,—“the fact is, I have very strong suspicions whether what I have got lately is tea at all, or whether—but, dearie me, to think that I should have gone talking on all this time, and never so much as asked if there has been any news of your husband and Miss Mabel. I am so forgetful really, but I assure you it's in my heart all the time, only it misses the way out sometimes. They're getting on nicely, are they?”

Maud gave Miss Gabbatis a suitable portion of the information which the reader is already in possession of, to the effect that her papa and sister were comfortably located and enjoying themselves to a certain extent.

“Ah! I'm thankful to hear it. I always said it was the only thing dear Mr. Harcourt wanted; just a little change. You see he leads a very sedentary life among all those books of his; and it's not a good thing for a man, isn't that sort of

life. I'm not partial to study myself, or anything that's sedentary. I always said if I'd a boy to put out into the world, I'd hunt up a *standentary* occupation for him ; people hadn't ought to sit studying. It's a fine thing to be intellectual, but it don't suit digestion so far as my observation goes. You'll see Mr. Harcourt will be a new man in no time, now he's come down from the stars and got among the pebbles on the sea-shore. And dear Miss Mabel too, I hope she's getting on nicely. Take my word for it, Mrs. Harcourt, you'll soon lose both of your daughters. There's Miss Maud here going to be married, as all the village says, to Mr. Roden, and my best wishes to them both, for I'm sure there isn't a young man anywhere—why, not young exactly, but that's neither here nor there—that I have such a good opinion of; and I've said to myself over and over again, that if I was a young person in a position to settle, there isn't anybody I would sooner feel comfortable to settle upon than Mr. Roden; there's such breadth of character about him, you know, Mrs. Harcourt, such strength and manliness, so different from the general run of young men now-a-days, who look fit for nothing else but to be taken up with a pair of silver

sugar-tongs, and packed in pink cotton wool; so that really when I heard of it, Miss Maud, I said I would take the first opportunity, as a private friend of the family, of telling you how *very* glad I am."

Miss Gabbatis uttered this little oration with a steaming cup of tea in one hand and a quadrant of muffin in the other, which performed sundry gyrations in the air from time to time, illustrative of the profound delight its owner felt in the prospects of her young friend. And to do our chatty little maiden lady justice, there was a fund of downright benevolence and disinterested kindness in the heart of her, which welled up at the happiness of any of her friends, especially when that happiness was any way connected with the prospect of a settlement in life.

Maud did not blush and look conscious, she did not bridle up and beg to assure Miss G., with a profusion of vehement asseverations that it was entirely a false report, that people were always talking; that, in fact, nothing would be farther from her thoughts than any such thing; that there had never been anything but civility, &c. &c., and that she should feel extremely obliged if Miss Gabbatis would make a point of informing

every one who mentioned the subject to her that society at large was entirely under a mistake; and then relapse into a dignified silence. A love, earnest and strong and holy like hers, had no need of such wiles. She only smiled her quiet thanks for the good wishes, and by a tact which rarely needed to be exercised, turned the stream of talk into another channel. Miss Gabbatis, however, came back to the old track by and by.

“And dear Miss Mabel too. Take my word for it, she’ll leave her heart behind her as sure as sure. Those watering-places are the most terrible opportunities for getting oneself entangled in matrimonial affairs that ever I heard of. You know Miss Agnes Albyn got drawn in with young Major Reresby during that month at Brighton, and she’s never been the same girl since; and I’ve always said to myself, though I never mentioned it to anyone else, that that splendid match of Mrs. Herman Kay’s daughter, splendid at least in a worldly point of view, though for myself I don’t believe in foreign counts, was all made up down yonder at Margate. I’m sure I’ve thought over and over again what a pity it was that I was never properly introduced by my parents at the sea-side; there’s no knowing what might have

happened. Not that I'm discontented with things as they are, for there isn't a sparrow in the parish of Braeton has got less worldly care than I have; and not that I mean to insinuate, my dear Mrs. Harcourt, for one moment, that—you understand — any intention, at least anything at all of that sort with regard to Miss Mabel—but you know in case anything *should* happen, and one never can tell in this world what's going to happen, you have my best wishes, my *very* best wishes. No, thank you, Miss Maud, I'll take another of these little biscuits; your cook does make such delightful little biscuits. I'm going to ask her to lend me the receipt some day. I always admired Miss Mabel; she was so very exemplary with her counting, and kept time as sure as a metronome. Indeed, she quite won my affections by the way she used to play her scales and exercises; really so much soul and expression in them, it used quite to work upon my feelings sometimes, and I always said to myself at that time, and I've said so ever since, and you know, Mrs. Harcourt, I never say anything I don't mean, though I do slip out a good many remarks of one sort and another in the course of the day ——”

Miss Gabbatis waited for Mrs. Harcourt to assent to the truth of this proposition, as though not entirely convinced of it in her own mind, and then proceeded.

“I always said that Miss Mabel would make a jewel, a perfect *jewel* of a wife for any one who was fortunate enough to win and wear her; and do, Miss Maud, make my best respects to her when you write, and tell her that whenever she gets a home of her own, I shall feel the very greatest of pleasure in popping in odd times of an evening and offering her my congratulations.”

Towards the close of these friendly wishes, the earnestness of Miss Gabbatis deepened, causing most of her words to be pronounced in italics, and accompanied by various illustrative motions of her hands. Having at last completed the prospective matrimonial felicity of the two young ladies, and benevolently established them in a couple of nicely-furnished houses, with three servants each and a tortoise-shell kitten from her nursery, she leaned back in her arm-chair, a smile of serene, full-rounded contentment overspreading her virgin features.

An hour later Stephen Roden and Maud were sauntering up the watercourse in Lingold Wood,

while the slant sunlight broke in quivering lines through lacing branches overhead, and the purple glory of evening rose and crowned the far-off reaches of the Downshire hills.

And Mabel, what was she doing up on the north shore at Scarbro'? She shall tell us for herself in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XIII.

Scarbro', August.—

“For August is a pleasant month,
The best of all the year.”

I wonder now who said that, and I wonder where he was when he said it. Was he here at Scarbro', pacing up and down those long drawn out south sands with their wearying array of hats and plumes, carriages and donkeys, shell stalls and fancy work stalls, pseudo beggars with graduated rows of children in clean white pinafores and an air of distress; or promenading on the Spa, nearly crushed to death, as I have been this blessed morning with the French cloaks, flounces and brocade; or tickled and brushed against with long sweeping feathers of all tints; or blinded with pink, and blue, and green, and white, and purple, and cerise parasols; or accidentally hit by smart

fancy canes, and then politely apoligised to by the holders of the same; or rubbed, scrubbed, and grazed by those huge amorphous sea-side costumes which gentlemen wear now-a-days; or ogled through impertinent eye-glasses, or quizzed through fussy spectacles; or pestered with the vision of moustaches, and imperials, and whiskers of all degrees of cultivation and amplitude; or stumbled over and run against by moving towers of muslin work and blue ribbons, which on closer inspection turn out to be little boys from two years old and upwards? I say, was the poet undergoing any or all of these inflictions when he propounded it as his opinion that August is a pleasant month, the best of all the year? I trow not.

I haven't felt quite so dull and dreary, though, for this last week. I begin to see that there is no phase of life without its own points of special, peculiar interest. I have learned a good deal of human nature since I came here, something to ponder over and think about when we go back to our quiet Braeton home. Moreover, I can amuse myself by watching the little flirtations which are daily carried on down stairs, and being perfectly indifferent to any and all of the parties therein

engaged, I can draw my conclusions and make my observations with more freedom.

I used to think before I came here that people never went to the sea-side except for the sake of their health. Dear me, what a huge mistake I have made. Mr. Grey, who left us last Thursday, appears, so far as I can judge, to be the only one who came here with that object in view, and I am happy to say he seems to have gained it to a satisfactory extent. If the others reach their goal with as much success, there will be an extensive issue of bridal cards and white favours before this time next year, as sure as my name is Mabel Harcourt. I did not find this out by my own unaided penetration though, for Isabella Ponde put me into the right track about it.

Two or three days ago we were sitting in the ladies' drawing room after dinner, and she was telling me all about her home life and belongings. Miss Ponde has taken to me in a wonderful manner lately, and makes me the receptacle of a vast amount of private information which, as she vehemently asseverates, she would not have confided to any other mortal upon earth. Well, let her do so. What I have done to merit this generous trust is at present a mystery; but it does

not signify so long as the confidences are all on one side, which I am happy to state is the case at present.

Amongst other things she told me she couldn't endure life at the Marshes, every thing is so desperately flat, and there is nobody to flirt with; so she teases her mamma until she gains her point and comes down here for a couple of months or so, for the sake of a little sport in that line.

"Then you haven't come here for your health?" I said, rather wishing her to be gone, for she had come and placed herself at my elbow just as I was sitting down to finish a sketch of the Castle hill and pier.

"Come here for my health!" she said with that gay bravado laugh of hers. "I don't look as if I ailed anything, do I?"

She didn't certainly. Miss Ponde would bear comparison with anybody, even Mrs. Sharrup, for breadth of chest and shoulder, though her tall stature serves to carry off a little of this redundant amplitude. Moreover her face is instinct with life and energy; and as for her lungs, the amount of sea air she daily inspires by means of that sonorous laugh safely guarantees them against the remotest contingency of consumption.

“Then,” said I, preparing to wash in my foreground with sepia and neutral tint, “may I ask what you *did* come for?”

“Dear me, Miss Harcourt,” and here the laugh rang out again, “what an ignoramus you are! Do you know, when first I saw you come into the dining room with that empress swing of yours” (I am putting down her exact words), “and your flashing eyes and magnificent hair—I would give anything if my hair was half as dark—I thought you were a regular woman of society, one of those stylish creatures we read about in novels and fashion books, and here, when I come to talk to you, I find you are the veriest simpleton. Mabel, Miss Harcourt I mean, excuse me for saying such a thing, but you really are.”

I think we hadn’t been in the house three days before Miss Ponde found out my name, and asked if she might call me by it. But I declined accepting that familiarity. A stranger to call me by my own home name, my dear fireside name—thank goodness, for that thing at least, I don’t belong to the society of Friends. No, a thousand times no. Let me be Mabel to none but those I love. Any other girl would have retired into her shell at this refusal, but it makes no impression on Isabella

Ponde. Well, I confessed to my ignorance of this world and its "society," of which I had been considered such a distinguished ornament, and intimated that I was open to any amount of information she could give me touching its proceedings and institutions, especially that phase of them which is turned towards one in a fashionable watering-place. So she proceeded to enlighten me.

"You think we come here for our health do you? Well then, the sooner you get such a notion cleared out of that splendid head of yours the better. How cleverly you dash away at that foreground, those rocks come out first-rate, and those little fishing smacks are touched in so nicely. I once tried to learn drawing myself, and had a master from the town, but after I had been at it half a year, he said he might as well try to teach a potato. I thought it wasn't very encouraging, so I threw it overboard, and asked mamma to get me a set of archery implements and let me learn shooting, as being more in the potato line. But to return to what we began about. The fact is, Ma—Miss Harcourt, I mean, only I've got such a bad memory—one half the girls come here as farmers go to market, or merchants to the Exchange, to see what can be done in the way of

business, and to push their fortunes in a matrimonial point of view. The gentlemen the same. Mind, I speak from observation, not from practical experience; for, as I told you when we were walking on the sands yesterday, I was only nineteen last May, and I haven't the least intention of handing over my freedom to the keeping of any male individual for the next half dozen years at least. Miss Harcourt, I hate sentimentality and marrying in one's teens; it's a thing I could never see the sense of. But then you know one must have something to do, so I just come here to flirt the time away."

I worked on quietly at my drawing, taking in and remembering every word she said, and yet as utterly apart from her in every thought and feeling as—well, I can't find a comparison that comes up to my requirements, so I must leave it.

"I am honest, am I not, Miss Harcourt? To flirt and nothing else. Dear me, I do admire that painting of yours. Just lend me a brush, will you, and let me dabble a bit on this scrap of waste paper."

I passed her my colour box, and she went on with her idle talk. I half listened with dreamy inattention, gazing out between whiles at the blue

sea which still rolled on with that *soodling*, unconscious, undulating motion; and watching the pure clouds which swept in their shining coronation robes through the sun's bright presence chamber. And brown-sailed vessels passed to and fro, and distant masts appeared and disappeared like specks on the far horizon, while close beside us the old grey Castle seemed to frown its mute rebuke upon our vain words.

“We must have something to do,” she said. Yes, I had quite settled that in my own mind. How often, long and long ago, I had talked over that same truth with Miss Nunly in the little wainscoted parlour at Marbook, and listened with grave, reverent stillness while she spoke to me, in that thoughtful monotone of hers, of life, its infinite seriousness, and responsibility, and earnestness; how to each of us a work is given, clearly shaped out in our own conscience, and how the whole duty which lies upon us is to read out this work patiently in the light of truth, and then act it bravely, religiously, not thinking of honour or reward, but simply of God's command. “We must have something to do,” said Miss Nunly, “therefore let us pray for Him to reveal it to us, to strengthen us for all duty, and nerve us for all

trial in its accomplishment.” “We must have something to do,” says Isabella Ponde, “so we come here and flirt.” And I marvelled that two people brought up in the same creed, and reading from the same Bible, should stand so far apart, so very far apart.

“Yes—that is about the truth,” she continued in a straightforward business-like sort of tone, hitting off with saucy fidelity some of the heads of our company on her bit of waste paper, with a skill that convinced me the drawing-master, whoever he might be, had not gone the right way to work in bringing out her talent. “Now just you give a glance round at the company we have here. To begin with those two Miss Scrambles—do you suppose they canter their mornings away, day after day, on those long, uninteresting south sands, for the mere love of a ride?—or is it because they have discovered that the two eldest sons of that stylish family at No. 8, to whom they got an introduction at the ball last week, have likewise equestrian tendencies; and that a *rencontre*, followed by a *tête-à-tête* trot, is likely to ensue, which may lead to something advantageous? Our brace of young collegians, too, do you think they go to those promenade concerts for the sake of the

music? — not a bit of it. They can't tell a waltz from a Mazourka, or a galop from either; and would give you a ten times more lucid account of the ladies' dresses, and the new styles the gentlemen had of wearing their hair, than of D'Albert's last set of quadrilles, or that Septett of Beethoven's, which the band did so splendidly last night only."

All this time I went on touching in my little boats, and looking down on the strand between whiles, to get the effect of light and shade that I wanted.

"Then, again," she continued in the same matter-of-fact tones, "if you have eyes for anything, can you not see whither Miss Phebe Sharrup and Mr. Golden Brown are wending their way, and with what a supremely complacent air the young lady's mamma watches them down the cliffs together, and arranges country strolls for them? The other one is trying it on with the intellectualist, but it won't do, she's not up to the mark for him, and I mean to beat her off the field myself, before we go. I never think a season properly spent unless I make two or three conquests to keep myself in practice. A little more neutral tint, Miss Harcourt, to soften down that shadow

in the middle distance. Now just look here, haven't I done Mr. Golden Brown to the life? I'll put it inside Miss Phebe's copy of Longfellow, and then we shall see the whole story."

Here Mr. Stanley made his appearance at the door, with a fierce folio under his arm, and a profoundly metaphysical twist on his face; and Miss Ponde, who never talks to her own sex when there is a chance of male auditors, left me to my Castle rock, and was presently off at full sail with the intellectualist at the far end of the dining-room.

So you see, Maud, the atmosphere I breathe in here is not of the purest sort. Never mind, it won't hurt me. Some things roll off my mind like rain off a cabbage-leaf — Isabella Ponde's sweet instructions among them. Only it makes your purity stand out so sweetly. Maud, my sister Maud, I have no one to love but you. Do not give all to Stephen Roden, but keep just a little for me, remember it is all I have.

We got some fresh people the day before yesterday. Mrs. Tresilis from London, with her little boy; and a Mr. Lowe, who seems to be a clergyman, a quiet, dull sort of man, between thirty and forty, who rarely speaks to any one. He and papa seem to draw together rather, and what con-

versational powers he has appear to be chiefly developed as they go sauntering about on the cliff. Papa likes anybody who has no self-assertion. Also—shame on me that I should have mentioned him last — our little circle has been dazzled since Monday, by the advent of a magnificent phenomenon from North Wales, Shanklin Penarva, Esq., as the inquisitive world is informed by the labels on his portmanteaus.

I believe, since I came here, I have once noted my surprise at that obliqueness of public opinion which assigns the failing of vanity and love of dress entirely to the feminine half of the community. I only wish public opinion would take Mr. Penarva under consideration, and it would speedily find the advisability of a change in its modes of thinking. One might really fancy we were transplanted to the tropical luxuriance of the South Cliff again, so manifold and parti-coloured are the costumes exhibited on the person of this illustrious individual. To limit my remarks only to the fancy ties which encircle his aristocratic throat—for Mr. Penarva is an aristocrat, and no mistake, in the conventional acceptance of the word—what a field of variety opens before me. One morning he makes his appear-

ance in severe coloured *gros de Naples*, tied in a cast-iron bow of large horizontal expanse, and awful regularity of arrangement; the next, it has dwindled to the dimensions of an ordinary shoe-string, vainly striving to assert its independency under the superincumbent pressure of a stiff white collar. Anon it is a turbulent mass of rich brocade, fastened in the centre with a costly pin; and then before twelve hours have elapsed, as though ashamed of its exuberance, it collapses into a meek unconscious little tissue of network, tied in a Lilliputian knot, with the ends modestly dropping down over a set of diamond studs. By and by, it strengthens into a stout woollen fabric of free and easy style for shooting purposes, which again in its turn abdicates in favour of a superbly transparent starch and muslin article, wherein he shines resplendent at the promenade concerts. I dare not venture upon a description of the other parts of his costume, or my pen would cease from sheer weariness ere I had half concluded the task. Sometimes he shocks our Protestant principles by appearing in a vest of Popish cut, surmounted by a priestly-looking collar of spotless lawn; and then, before our orthodoxy has well recovered from the start, he astonishes us with gigantic plaids and

erratic stripes of all conceivable colours. One morning he promenades our terrace in pepper and salt, picked out with pearl buttons; the next it is changed for brown Holland and a straw hat, followed in turn by a Chinese-looking nankeen and peg-tops, or an amorphous sort of costume, composed entirely, to an unpractised eye at least, of flaps, and straps, and pockets; each of these aforementioned varieties, however, being replaced towards dinner time by a suit of raven black, and patent enamelled boots. As for pocket-handkerchiefs, how many has he, I wonder — from that last September shooting-season sort of thing, painted over with pointer's heads and a border of guns and powder-flasks, onward and upward to the dainty tissue of India muslin or white silk which flutters from his jewelled fingers when he is arrayed in full dress? N. B. When Mr. Penarva leaves, I mean to station myself at the front window, and carefully note down the number of portmanteaus handed into the fly after him.

He is a very striking contrast in this respect to our other new arrival, Mr. Lowe, whose garb seems just to be an outgrowth of the inner man — sombre, and quiet, and steady. He wears a loose, comfortable-looking grey overcoat, and sober

black tie, like Stephen Roden's. There is nothing about him by which you can come at his profession, if he has any; but I fancy, by one or two things I have heard him say, that he is a clergyman. I think there is a great deal to be gathered of a man from his dress. I have formed my impressions of some people from the very cut of their coats, and not found myself mistaken either. Our North Wales meteor photographed himself on my private judgment the first morning he came, by the light of that redoubtable striped costume, and succeeding observations have only served to tone and develop, and bring out the picture more certainly. Men of science and learning, you may say what you choose as to the proclivities of our sex towards personal adornment; but I say, and let who will contradict me, — Vanity, thy name is Shanklin Penarva, Esq.

And now I must give over, for the first dinner-bell rang ten minutes since.

CHAPTER XIV.

Scarbro', August. — We had a bit of a storm last night. I heard the waves hurrying and foaming and roaring, as I lay awake. Oh! if it had only been light, so that I could have seen their proud grandeur. After listening a long time, I fell asleep, and dreamed that I was on a sinking vessel; our two collegians were spinning round in their fright like a couple of teetotums. Isabella Ponde's great laugh rang out through the clang and tumult, and Mr. Penarva was flying up and down the deck in a magnificent costume that I had never seen before, but can't remember. Somehow I didn't feel frightened myself in the midst of it all. Presently a huge wave rolled up, crashing the ship in two, and just as I was sinking down, Mr. Lowe, in his grey overcoat, came from the further end, leaped over the chasm, and carried

me safe to land. Poor Mr. Lowe, just as if *he* could ever be such a hero as that; but we do dream such nonsense sometimes.

When I awoke, all was still and calm and shining; the waves playing and chasing one another up the sands, the little crests of white foam flickering in and out among them, and the blue sky looking down as placidly as if there had never been anything to do. After breakfast papa and I went down to the shore. I could only tell there had been a storm by the long tresses of deep-water sea-weed which had been thrown far up upon the rocks. Ah! if no one else might remember this storm by anything else,—if no poor sailor's wife has her whole future blackened by it! Mr. Lowe was down on the shore too; he was standing over one of the clear little rock pools, and smiling as he watched the sea-weed drifting to and fro.

I said we had got another lady, a Mrs. Tresilis, from London. Oh! Maud, she is so beautiful, so fascinating. Let me try if I can make you see her. You remember our favourite “Lied” of Mendelssohn's, the “river song.” Well, she is just like that. To look at her is like listening to music, which goes breaking, and rippling, and

flickering past you, with beauty and freshness in every note. She is not very tall, not much taller than you, Maud, but such a swaying grace in every step; and to see her go about the room is the very poetry of motion. Her hair, a very deep bluey black, sweeps back from her face and shows the fine undulating lines of her forehead; then it is gathered into a great shell-like knot behind, and falls down in heavy ringlets. And when she smiles—oh, Maud! how that smile flashes over her face, and sends the crimson colour into her cheeks; and when she hears a fine thought read, or sees something that is beautiful, it seems as if a light were suddenly kindled within her face, it looks so intense and quivering. The little boy she has with her is about five years old. I thought at first he must be her brother, for she does not look more than twenty, until I heard him call her “mamma.” He is a quiet, steady, thoughtful little fellow, with none of her quick impetuosity about him.

But, Maud, she is not happy. I know she is not. Yesterday at dinner, when they were talking about that poor woman who had drowned herself because her husband was unkind to her, there came the saddest look over her face, not so much

sympathy as quick, bitter pain; and though she said nothing, her eyes looked so keen and hungry; and as soon as dinner was over she went away, and I saw her walking up and down the sands for hours. Once I have heard her playing on the piano when she thought no one else was in the room, and oh! the weary, longing, restless sound she put into some of the notes.

But she is mostly very brilliant. Poor Miss Ponde has quite relapsed and dwindled into insignificance before this new beauty. The intellectualist has had neither eyes nor ears for anybody else save Mrs. Tresilis, since he found out that she studies Carlyle; and as for the two collegians, they buzz and flutter round her from morning to night, like moths round a candle. Only Mr. Golden Brown's faculties remain intact, and he swerves not from his allegiance to the charms of the fair Phebe.

As for Mr. Lowe, he never takes any notice of her; only sometimes when she sits down to the piano and sings some of her wild, passionate songs; or dashes off into some strange argument with Mr. Stanley, about fate and destiny, and so forth, he looks at her rather mournfully. I often think he must know something about her.

I should like to ask him, but I have not been introduced to him yet, so have never spoken, and I feel afraid of making up to him, he is so shy and distant.

Tuesday.—I have a great deal to say to-day. I am sitting at my little room window, where I have sat so often before that it has come to have a home-like sort of feeling. And the blue sea murmurs on its still, monotonous evening song. What a strange sound it is; such a dim, confused whisper, that seems to say so much and reveal so little. Often, when I have listened to it a long time, I get impatient and could say, “Speak up, speak up; tell me what it is you mean; don’t be always whispering.”

We went on Sunday morning to the old church; we made a mistake and got there half an hour too soon, so I left papa in the porch and walked round to try if I could find Anne Brontë’s grave. I came upon it at last, after a long search, in a detached part of the churchyard near the sea; just a plain upright stone, with a simple inscription. There was a gentleman standing beside the grave, so I did not go very close, only just near enough to read the words, and to perceive that the gentleman was Mr. Lowe. He had his

arms folded and was looking down upon the grassy mound with that peculiar grave sort of expression I have often noticed in his face — often did I say? — nonsense; he only came yesterday week; but, nevertheless, I *have* noticed it.

So I joined papa again, and we went into the church. Just before service began he came in, I mean Mr. Lowe, and sat in the pew before us. Mrs. Tresilis was there with her little boy Frank, but she never looked for the places in her prayer-book, and seemed in a kind of dream all the while. Only when the clergyman read that beautiful collect for the sixth Sunday after Trinity, there came over her face such a look of utter sorrow, and her hands were locked so hard and fast together.

I could not keep my thoughts steady. I never can in a strange place. Somehow they would go rambling about, first to Anne Brontë's grave, where she sleeps, lulled by that incessant ocean wail; then to poor, beautiful Mrs. Tresilis, with her strange, unknown, sorrowful life; then to Mr. Penarva, sitting close under the pulpit, resplendent in a shiny waistcoat and more rings than I cared to count; then to Mr. Lowe, whose

profile I could see so distinctly as he knelt in the pew before me.

I believe if anyone has a quiet mind, he has.

When the sermon began, he left his book open on the desk. The wind fluttered the leaves over to the beginning, where I read this, — “To Philip Lowe, from his godmother, Sept. 1827.” I suppose she would most likely give it to him at his christening, so that makes him about thirty. He might be more than forty, by the looks of him. His hair is turning so grey, and he has that staid, upright, self-dependent sort of look one seldom sees before middle life. Rather striking, too, his face is, when one comes to study it attentively, such strong lines of thought upon it; such searching, keen, brown eyes, and lips clasped and bolted as if nothing could ever pass them. He gives me the impression of a man whose whole life has been marked by intense and continued self-control, which has stamped itself at last on every motion and expression; a man with whom conscience is everything, and mere inclination nothing. I was still looking at the fly-leaf of his prayer-book when he turned round and saw me. He seemed slightly annoyed, for he closed the book soon after. Never fear, Mr.

Philip Lowe, I have no wish to pry into your chronological secrets, not the slightest. And yet I had rather he had not seen me looking towards his book.

Would anybody think Mr. Lowe handsome? I fancy not. Those young collegians quiz him. Mr. Golden Brown is afraid of him, Miss Ponde thinks him a terrible frump, the Misses Scramble ridicule him — poor silly girls, and I — well, I am just indifferent, that's all. But what have men to do with handsomeness? If there is one thing I detest more than another, it is a man who is pervaded with the consciousness of being "prepossessing," Curly locks, white forehead, aristocratic nose, Grecian contour, pale complexion, interesting expression, &c. &c. Pah, pah, as Miss Malvina Scramble says, when she speaks of her paternal relative. I am glad my future brother-in-law is not a handsome man. I am glad Mr. ——— well, never mind.

Let me think over that collect again. I suppose I have heard it often and often at our own Braeton church, yet it never seemed so full of meaning as it did that Sunday morning. Poor Mrs. Tresilis, she is not happy, I am sure she is not. I chanced to go into the ladies' drawing-

room this afternoon, very quietly, for I knew papa had gone to sleep in his own room above. She was leaning over the end of the sofa, her hands clasped upon her forehead, her lips pressed together until only a faint crimson line was left, and such a look; oh, such a stony look in her great deep eyes. Grant I may never see such a look in yours, my sister Maud. When she saw me, she started up, saying something about a headache — heartache, more likely. Poor Mrs. Tre-silis.

I did not like to say anything, so I went to the window, and watched the huge grey masses of cloud roll behind the Castle keep, and studied over my little locket-portrait of Maud, as I often do when I am alone. There was no one else in the room. By and by she came gently up to me and laid her hand on my shoulder. When she saw the locket she drew back and apologised for interrupting me, and was going away, thinking no doubt that I was sentimentalising on some far off swain. So I said, "Don't go away, please, it is only Maud's portrait."

"Maud! who is Maud?"

"She is my sister, I have no other sister but her."

"May I see it?" she said, and then, without waiting for a reply, she took the picture out of my hand and studied it very intently. Oh, she looked so beautiful standing there within the window, the soft wavy outline of her face and the sweeping coils of her black hair thrown out so clearly upon the crimson curtains. And her eyes seemed so full of thoughts.

"Maud!" she said at last; "it is a peaceful name. I had a sister Maud once, as pure and quiet as a snowdrift. She died long ago, long ago, before the hot sun rose and earth-born thoughts had time to stain her. Your Maud is very quiet too; there is no tumult in her face. Is she married, I wonder? No, she cannot be, or she would not look so calm—why need I have asked?"

"She will be before long," I said, with a strange feeling that all would not be well, and I held out my hand for the picture. I did not like it to be in her keeping, that restless, unhappy, beautiful Mrs. Tresilis.

"And you are sure, quite sure, she loves him, no one but him," she said, as she let me take the locket back; "he is everything to her?"

"Maud's love is quiet, but very deep," I said. And it is, Maud, I know it is, the brightener

and purifier of all your life. If I could rest on such a love, or she either, would it not be better for both of us, Maud? "Poor girl, poor girl!" Mrs. Tresilis said, and then she went to the piano and sang that last song of Beatrice in "The Cenci." Oh, how her voice made me creep and shudder when she came to those words—

"There is a snake in thy smile, my dear,
And a bitter poison within thy tear."

Her singing brought most of the people back again into the room, as it always does. I never heard any one sing like Mrs. Tresilis; her whole soul seems to gush up and overflow her voice so. It is the very heart of her that sings and wails and laments in those rich tones. I think sometimes that if I could sing—but I can't, for I have no more voice than a jackdaw, and can't croon through even the simplest melody except in my thoughts—but I have thought that if I could sing, I should be very chary how I put much feeling into the song, how I let my joys or sorrows look through my voice. There seems to me to be something a little—I hardly know how to express it, but something not quite right in letting a whole room full of commonplace, uninterested people see how well you can pour out

your feelings, and allowing them to criticise and marvel at those deep hidden powers which have given such passionate expression to your song. I believe Maud feels in this way too. I never heard her in company attempt any song that required for its true interpretation more than a quiet or elevated strain of thought. Only when she has been alone, and fancied no one was near, have I heard her pour out her whole heart in that grand German music of Mendelssohn and Beethoven. But Mrs. Tresilis does not feel in this way, and besides I should think she is one of those women who must have a safety-valve of some sort for their feelings, or they would rise and get the mastery over them.

When she had finished the whole company broke out into loud applause. "Sweet pretty thing," said one. "Deep feeling," said another. "Splendid, lovely," said a third. "I do admire a contralto voice." "Fine *portamento* that in the finale," and so on. I alone was silent. They were clamorous for another song, but she said, wearily, "Not now." As she rose and left the piano, she half clasped my hand and whispered, "I will tell you all some time."

Poor Mrs. Tresilis!

Mr. Lowe puzzles me. He has scarcely spoken a word to me yet. If we meet on the stairs, or on the cliff or beach, he bows gravely and passes on. I never was so slighted in my life. He is even more polite to that noisy rattle-brained thing, Miss Ponde. Only once or twice, when I have been talking to Mrs. Tresilis about some passages in our favourite authors, I have chanced to look up, and found his eyes fixed upon me with such a serious, searching expression.

We shall have been here three weeks to-morrow, and that was the time fixed for Papa to stay, so I suppose I may begin to-night and pack up my things ready for going home. It has not been such a very dreary time after all as one might have thought. I must mind and not forget anything. My orderly little sister Maud laughs at me so when we go on a journey together, for I am sure to jump up halfway on the road with an exclamation about something I have left behind, and then she tells me very quietly that she has put it in some corner or other of my portmanteau—kind little Maud!

Not leave anything behind me! Can I do that? Is it possible to stay three weeks in a place and not leave *anything* behind? Is there

no influence that stays when we are gone, no little word spoken, no unconscious act, no example for good or evil, which we cannot take away, but must needs leave behind? Ah me, I fear that I shall leave much that I would have taken if I could. Three weeks, and I have not done an atom of good to any one. I have not tried to make Isabella Ponde one whit more serious than she is; I have not tried to cheer that quiet, sad mother of hers. I have not used the influence which superior intelligence would have given me over those two collegians. I have not cared to still the weary restlessness of poor Mrs. Tresilis. I have not even prayed for her, or told her of a higher, purer life where these things never come. I have not tried to learn from others, or how much I might have gained from Mr. Lowe's example the little time he has been here! Ah! *he* will not take everything away with him when he goes.

Only one more day. Papa has said nothing about staying any longer, so I suppose we shall start perhaps by the afternoon train; and to-morrow at this time I shall be sitting in our little room at home with Maud, and she will be telling me about all that has happened since I have been

here — about her Sunday class, her old women, her girls' school, about Stephen Roden and his kind ways. And then, when I begin unpacking my things, she will help me to put them away, and say with that merry laugh of hers, "Well, Mabel, what have you left behind, as you haven't had me to look after you?"

And what is it that I have left behind—what?

I can hear them talking and joking together down in the dining-room, Isabella Ponde loudest of them all; Mr. Penarva's shallow voice putting in its word now and then, Mr. Stanley laying down the law in his long-drawn sentences, Mrs. Tresilis speaking rarely, but when she does all is silence. Mr. Lowe is walking with Papa on the terrace: something interesting it is they are talking about, I can tell by the looks of him. How gentle and almost sweet those strong lines in his face become when any beautiful thought is working within; how the whole expression softens, relaxes, until the thought is past, and then the iron bands gird the face again, and the lips draw down into their self-controlled curve, and all is stern, inflexible, rigid. I should like to have known Mr. Lowe. Very much I should like to have known him, but it is too late now. Perhaps

the first words I speak to him will be to say good-bye. And yet it will be pleasant to think that for once in a while I have come across a really fine character.

Good night, waves; good night, for the last time. You are looking grey-like now, and the sun is away, but I can listen to you still. You speak to me half pleasantly, half sadly, to-night. You have told me many things, and perhaps you will never speak to me any more. Is any one else watching you? —do you speak to any one else to-night? Or is it only to Mabel Harcourt that you sing that strange whispering chaunt? Good night, waves! good night! good night!

CHAPTER XV.

Scarbro', Saturday.—How many things seem to have happened since I wrote here last, only two days ago! I got up very early yesterday morning to put my things together, ready for going home; but I had hardly begun when I heard Papa calling me to go for a walk with him on the sands. So I tumbled them into the port-manteau any way, and joined him. When we had got down the cliff, and were careering along the sunshiny beach, watching the tide running in and out among the shallows, and dashing up into spray round the Castle rock, he told me he felt so much better for the change that he thought of staying a fortnight longer instead of returning home that day.

I answered, "Very well, it is quite right. I am glad you feel so much better;" and so I am, very glad indeed.

"Besides," he continued, "I have made some agreeable acquaintance among the gentlemen here, that I should like to keep up a little longer. Mr. Lowe and I get on very pleasantly together."

"Indeed," I said, and stooped to gather a long tress of brown sea-weed from a rock pool close by.

"Yes," Papa went on in his quiet way, "he is a silent, reserved sort of man, but exceedingly kind, and a friend worth taking care of. He was saying the other day that he thought my sedentary life at home did not quite suit me."

"How does Mr. Lowe know what sort of a life you have at home?" I thought, but did not say anything.

"I have been thinking, however, Mabel, that perhaps this house we are in now does not exactly suit your ways; though, so far as I am concerned, I like it well enough; so, if you choose, we will look out for private lodgings, as we are to be a fortnight or possibly three weeks longer."

Three weeks longer! If Papa had told me this ten days ago, how my heart would have sunk at the thought of three weeks more of Scarbro' bustle and show! Now, however, it is different. I told him there was no need to go into private

lodgings on my account, for I had got accustomed to this kind of life, and did not mind it so much. Perhaps, if I had told him the whole truth, I might have said more than that.

So, after tramping half an hour longer over the sands, we turned homewards for breakfast. It so chanced that, as we were making the ascent, my hat blew off, and careered along the cliff, quite down to the sands, where it directed its course to the very wettest part, and wheeled away as merrily as could be. Mr. Lowe was near, and picked it up for me; we had a good laugh over it, which seemed to shake the ceremony out of both of us. Then I squeezed the water from the ribands as well as I could, and he turned back with me up the cliff, to recapture it in case it should take flight again. That pretty brown hat of mine, which Maud trimmed for me only the night before I came here — to have it spoiled like this! It hangs up on the curtain pin just beside me now, a streaky, shapeless, unviewly piece of goods, that will never be worth sixpence again. And yet I did not feel so vexed about it as one might have expected. It is astonishing how a fresh morning sea-breeze freshens the temper and braces the nerves.

But this is not what I was going to say when I began to write.

Poor Mrs. Tresilis! It was last night when tea was over, and most of our company had decked themselves out for the customary promenade on the Spa. Miss Phebe, in a pale, consumptive-looking book-muslin, drifted off in a passive, unconcerned way with Mr. Golden Brown. The collegians, fancy ties, eye-glasses, and all, formed a coalition with the Miss Scrambles, and Isabella Ponde was scheming to be escorted by the intellectualist. All these manœuvres I could see well enough as I sat with Mrs. Tresilis, within the shadow of the bay window, just upon the balcony. We were having a long, long talk about that poem, "The Cry of the Human." Mr. Lowe had lent it to her the day before. How strangely her bright beautiful thoughts, so yearning and so restless, contrasted with the utter inanity and commonplaceness of the group below, intent on their own little frivolities, and thinking only how best to while the time away!

But Mrs. Tresilis did not seem to see them as she sat there looking out on the long range of hills in the west, behind which the sun was even now hiding, among curtains of purple and crim-

son. Papa and Mr. Lowe were talking at the other end of the room.

I have often seen art and nature incongruously enough mixed together, but never more so than at this place. The still, calm majesty of the ocean, the lofty sweep of the cliffs, the long grey lines of far-off hills stretching towards the west, the manifold soft voices of wind and wave and wood — all these, mingled with the glare and glitter of fashion, the whirl of gaiety, the ceaseless striving after display, the pomp and show of wealth, the idle gauds of worldliness, give one a feeling of restlessness, of real life clashing with the artificial.

“Let us go out, Mabel,” she said after a while, for, in addition to everything else, a band of musicians had placed themselves before the window, and the whole set of people belonging to our row had turned out like so many butterflies; “let us go out away from it all, and leave this noisy rack for a quiet walk over the cliff.”

We were soon equipped, for, having no end in view but personal convenience, our toilets were not quite so elaborate as those of the gay group who had just marched off to the Spa. We went past the old churchyard where Anne Brontë rests ;

through the gay streets with their brilliant shops and idle loiterers, and up the winding ascent of the Esplanade to the top of the south cliff. There we were quite alone. The strong current of fashion had swept all Scarbro', that is all civilised Scarbro', into the Spa gardens, to hear Kreutzer's band, and, looking down thitherwards from our lofty eyrie, we could catch stray glimpses of varicoloured costume, flowery parasols, and many-tinted plumes fluttering about among the foliage. When the evening wind came our way too, it brought with it wandering, uncertain snatches of waltzes, polkas, galops, with now and then a phrase of Mozart or a sigh from "Traviata." Gradually though, as we walked on, these were left behind, until at last we stood, Mrs. Tre-silis and I, with only Nature for our companion. Not a sound but the tramp of waves on the far-away rocks below, and a low, faint, surging echo, as they rolled back again to their ocean bed. The long, long line of cliffs and headlands, stretching towards Filey and Flamborough, stood out brave and clear against the already deepening sky, holding the blue waters so sharply outlined in their grand sweep. There was no motion that we could see, no sign of busy life anywhere, save

a few little brown-sailed fishing cobles tacking about very idly and quietly and listlessly, with the receding tide, waiting for night to come before they went out. Looking towards the west, there was yet the warm glow of sunset flooding its purple light over that other sea of undulating moorland that rippled away into the distance, and touching into a softer outline the rugged forms of the Wold hills. So calm, so grand, so still everything was. We seemed to stand in this great solitude reverently, as in His presence who made it.

My thoughts went home to Maud. What would she be doing? Ah! I knew well enough. This was Mr. Roden's night. They would be sitting now under the great old beech tree at the bottom of the garden, or perhaps on the little bridge, watching the sun go down over Lingold lake, listening to the soft musical ripple of the Mar brook, the sighing of the wind up rivulets of fern and wavy grass, and thousand other voices which speak so pleasantly to those who have ears to hear. And I wonder why it was that as I thought thus of my sister, there came ever and anon a vision of Mr. Lowe as he had met me on the sands that morning. After a while it was not

only ever and anon that it came, for it settled down quietly and steadily there by the side of Stephen and Maud.

We walked on without speaking a word. There is always something in beauty or sublimity which makes Mrs. Tresilis very still. I remember, when I first went with her on the Castle rock, and we looked out over that great blue sweep of ocean, she whispered, "Don't speak to me, Mabel, don't speak to me, please, just yet." So now I walked by her side mute and thoughtful, not only because she wished it, but because something had come over me which made it seem best, most fitting so.

"You have been thinking about Maud," she said at last.

How strange it is that Mrs. Tresilis seems so often to dive into my thoughts, as if by a sort of clairvoyance! No one ever did so before; I think no one will ever do so again. I told her I had been thinking about my sister.

"And so have I — poor little Maud, quiet little Maud! I know her, I see her perfectly—very trustful, very innocent. But you are quite sure she loves him, Mabel,—you are quite sure of that?"

Again I told her that Maud's love was lasting

and earnest, like everything else about her, and I was sure no time nor fortune could ever mar it. It is so, Maud.

“Ah! well,” she said, walking quietly on, and talking to herself in a sort of undertone, “the cup is given to all: some drink, and then, like Socrates, compose themselves quietly to sleep, and so die; others drink, and straightway the fountains of grief are opened, never more to close. Mabel, don’t marry for duty; if you do, the bitterness of it will never end.”

I did not intend to marry for duty — in fact, I did not think it likely I should ever marry at all; so her words seemed to float over me without much meaning. And yet there was a charm in what she said, for I knew she was speaking out heart truth for herself, if for no one else.

“Let me tell you it all, Mabel, and you will not be angry; you will only pity.”

And then she began, not waiting for me to answer by word or look, but speaking on quietly, sometimes impetuously, sometimes in a long far-back sort of tone, and with a great sadness in her voice; then carelessly, as though it mattered not. I will write it all just as she said it.

“They tell me I am very beautiful, and I

know it. And people praise what they call my Italian fervour and poetic temperament — well, let them do so ; it pleases them, and they cannot see further. It was always so. I was only a little girl when my father — thank God, Mabel, that you have not such a father — used to dress me in white robes, and put a crown of bay leaves on my head, and make me recite the odes of Sappho and the grand numbers of the old Greek poets, little thinking that I understood it all, and said with far other than a child's ardour those great impassioned thoughts. O Mabel!" and here her voice had a bitter dash of irony, "I had a first-rate classical education, you may depend. And his friends used to come, and they called me the little muse, the child Euterpe, and he used to be so proud.

"One came with the rest who was very kind to me, an artist, a great-souled intellectual man, who stood among them, in his glorious power and genius, as Mendelssohn among all musicians — the king, the crowned one. When I see his equal now, my heart bows down to do him homage. He lifted me out of the artificial atmosphere in which I breathed ; he taught me to reason, he taught me to feel, he taught me to search out ;—

O Mabel, if he had only taught me to believe, but he never tried to do that. He read me Homer's rugged stories, and Goethe's strange webs of moonshine, and Schiller's calm stately verse. And I used to sing whilst he stood over me and listened; and I played him grand, deep-meaning German music, which he had taught me himself to feel and to enjoy. Then he brought me Dante, and he measured his great overmastering intellect to mine, that we might walk together through those cantos of cloistered gloom and moonlighted thought; I all the while so listening to him, and looking to him, and building up my life upon him, until it seemed to me at last as if the old poet's fancies might come true, and we two traverse hand in hand that unknown, shapeless future; only that the dream should be changed, and he be my Beatrice, my guide, to lead me upward and onward, to the golden heaven of perfect peace. And so, Mabel, through all this I learned to love him. Unwittingly enough to both of us, my heart drew very near to his.

"I have hold of your hand now, and it does not tremble. No, Mabel, you have never known it yet — better so, better so; for it is a serious thing to love, Mabel, a very serious thing. It is

like leaving those shining sands beneath us, and setting sail on the great wide ocean, where heaven only knows what storms shall toss us or what destiny befall. Be sufficient for yourself, Mabel, if you would be happy. Do not throw your life away until you know its equal is given you."

These were strange words to me, who had grown up familiar with the outward forms at least of our noble, self-sacrificing Christian faith, which brings its sufficiency from above, its glory from self-forgetfulness. But I could find no words to answer her, and she went on in her strange, fitful, half-unconscious way.

"So month after month passed. Oh! I think of those long-ago times now, as we listen to some dear old song

" 'That's played
Too far off for the tune.'

"I did not care to ask myself why I was so happy; we never do, Mabel. It is only when the happiness is gone that we question ourselves whence it came. So I dreamed on. One night he came with many others to hear me sing. I remember so well, even now, the songs I sang. He stayed when all the rest had gone away, and still I sang to him, till long after the sun went

down, and the stars came out, and the moon began to quiver on the brook that ran by the window. Then he told me to go and fetch our Dante and he would read with me once more. I brought it and sat where I always sat, on a footstool at his feet.

“He said he would like us to read it once more together, for he was going away the next day to an appointment on the Continent, and would perhaps never come back to England. He told me I must practise well, for I had great talent, and might stand very high if I would take pains. He told me what music to choose and what masters to study. Then he bade me bring my Goethe and Tasso and Euripides, and marked the places he wished me to read—the marks are there yet. Then he found the place in Dante, and told me to begin. I did so, with a brave, steady voice—O Mabel, how strong we can be sometimes!—and read steadily on, though the words swam before me. Remember, I was only sixteen years old. When we had finished the chapter, he told me I might keep the book for myself if I liked; then shaking hands with me, he said good night, and left me.

“I ran up to my own room and stood at the

window in the chill and dark, listening to the sound of his footsteps on the gravel walk; and then, when I could hear it no more, there came over me that blank, utter darkness which has never gone away yet.

“It was not his fault, Mabel. He did not know what he was doing all the while. I was only to him a bright, talented child. He did not know how much he was teaching me that could never be unlearned again. I served to amuse him, that was all. But, oh! it is very hard to risk all you have and lose it—to let your heart go, warm and fresh and glorious, and full of hope, and have it come back to you a poor, worn-out, good-for-nothing, faded thing, that can never live any more, never any more at all. It is a dreary thing, Mabel, to lie down night after night with no wish but that ere the dawn of morning comes, the tides of sleep may have stranded you on the quiet shores of the great hereafter.”

I did not like to hear her speak in this way; to talk of death—that strange, solemn thing, which from my childhood I had heard named as the great portal of life, the dawn of a sure and bright and eternal rest to those who enter it rightly—as merely a vague “great hereafter.”

And yet, as before, I could find no words to say. Of all the sermons I had heard, of all the books I had read, no one sentence came up before me which might have soothed or comforted her. And then I began to feel, as everybody, I think, must feel at some time or other, but as I in my pride had never felt before, that to comfort others we must ourselves have suffered; that if we would speak words of counsel to the erring and ignorant, we must have received into our own hearts first the heaven-sent spirit of wisdom and humility. And I, with my self-sustained morality, had never done this. Oh! if it had only been Maud that walked by her side instead of me, Mrs. Tresilis would not have gone on so sad and un comforted. Nevertheless, the lesson remains; it was not taught in vain.

She continued speaking in her low rich voice, while the wind came sweeping and eddying over the brown moorland, and the ocean slowly changed from its warm purple tints to the cold beauty of twilight.

“ I dare say he never thought much about me afterwards. I was just a gifted child who served to pass his time pleasantly along, and to freshen his heart when it was weary with the shams and

hollowness of common life. He never knew—how should he?—all that he had been to me. After all it was only the old story over again. Many have done the like before, many will do it yet. Day by day I heard him talked of and discussed by ordinary people; night by night I thought over the past, and was once more wandering with him through the enchanted ground of old poetry and music, until, some few months after he had gone away, we received wedding-cards from him. He had married a German lady, and they were living at Berlin. He sent his best wishes to ‘little Marian,’ hoped she took care to practise a couple of hours every day and read Dante steadily, and then signed himself our faithful friend—that was all.

“I have not much remembrance of anything after that, but a dull, brooding sort of regret; not regret that I had loved unasked—I hold it no unworthy thing for any one to do that—but that loving unasked I had loved in vain: there lay the bitterness of it. But time is gentle. Quiet weeks and months lulled even this great grief to rest, so that I learned to look up once more. Mind, Mabel, I say lulled it, not conquered it; there are some things that time can never

conquer or quench. But I learned to think of it as we do of long dead and buried friends, who rest far away from all that we can do for them, and who need nothing from us but remembrance. You have no memories like this, Mabel. You lie calmly sleeping yet, but when it comes to you — the Awakener — you will think of all I say.

“Two years passed away; it was time for me to ‘come out,’ as the world calls it. So I was dressed in white and had a wreath of lilies put on, and went to my first ball. Mr. Tresilis was there. I suppose I looked very beautiful; every one paid me a great deal of attention. Old London dowagers, worn out with gaiety and grandeur, congratulated me on my ‘success,’ young ladies envied me, gentlemen flattered me, musicians composed waltzes and songs to me, artists took my portrait for the Academy. I found myself without an effort, nay, without even a wish, the belle of the season.

“I think we had not met more than three times when Mr. Tresilis asked me to be his wife. We were not rich, and Papa was anxious that I should get ‘settled’ early. He represented to me what a relief it would be to him to see me in a home of my own, occupying the position to which

my talents entitled me. It was my duty, he said, to establish myself in society. And so, for all were alike to me, I said it should be as he wished; and the close of the London season—for Papa disliked long engagements—found me in possession of an elegantly furnished villa at the West-end, the daintiest little carriage and pair of ponies that could be wished for, dresses, jewels, and trinkets without end, an unlimited supply of pocket-money, a brilliant circle of friends, Mr. Tresilis for my husband, and a memory of sadness for my portion such as I hope and trust you, Mabel, may never know. The only thing wanting was a *home*, and that I shall never have now. But see, the night is gathering; let us turn back.”

It was indeed gathering. We had walked on and on until the lights of the town had dwindled into faint specks, hardly discernible through the mist. The moors which an hour ago were so warm and purple now reached out, one black, pall-like, undulating mass; and far away below us the sea broke on the rocks with a wild, uncertain sound, the only sound we could hear.

I have a horror of being out at night alone, and in the midst of that great darkening plain we

seemed so waif-like and desolate. Mrs. Tresilis took my hand in hers, and we retraced our steps as quickly as we could. Yet it was not the barren moorland, nor the starless sky, nor the sea crooning on its eerie wail, that made me feel so lonely. It was the thought of what she had been telling me; it was the miserable, uncared-for, unwatched-over feeling which we have before our hearts have been anchored in sure and heavenly faith. Maud; walking under a sky as starless, would not have been half so lonely. Holy thoughts would have accompanied her, making the dark places bright; but we had no such thoughts.

We walked on without speaking a word. Mrs. Tresilis murmured to herself snatches of sad, restless songs, such songs as *he* had taught her to sing with all too true expression in those long-ago days, and never spoke save when she urged me to quicken our pace. We must have walked for nearly an hour, starting at every stray gust of wind that swept past us, and the long line of the cliff houses was just looming in sight, like a gigantic railway train, when I heard footsteps coming in our direction over the short elastic grass. Mrs. Tresilis drew back, but I was

not afraid. No one else trod in that firm, decided way. It was Mr. Lowe.

A great quietness came over me. I knew we were safe now. I had often had that same feeling years and years ago, when Maud and I were children coming home from school along the Marbrook road in the dark winter afternoons, and we heard Papa running to meet us. But somehow it never felt so pleasant, that sense of being protected, as it did now.

“Mr. Harcourt began to feel anxious about you,” he said, “and, as I knew the road you intended to take, I offered to come and look for you. You should not have stayed so late; you have made us uncomfortable.”

He gave Mrs. Tresilis his arm. I was going to walk by her, away from him, but he told me to come round to the other side, just in that quiet controlled voice that no one would ever think of contradicting. Once he looked closely down upon me to see if I was well wrapped up, and finding I had only my silk scarf on, he took off his plaid and put it round me without ever saying a word. I remember being struck with the pattern of that plaid the first time I saw it over his arm; it is a mixture of brown and white,

with deep, strong brown lines round the border, and I thought directly it belonged to a man of decided character. I have found out since that I was right.

Once or twice, if I lagged behind, for I was beginning to feel tired, he turned to look for me, and bade me keep close to them. And so we walked on, silent as ever. Mr. Lowe never talks much, but this night he was unusually quiet; perhaps he might be annoyed at having to come and meet us, for I once heard him say, when he was talking to Papa, that if there was one thing he disliked more than another it was turning out after sunset. I thought it was very kind of him to come at all, and ventured to say something to that effect, but he only replied I had better not talk, for Papa had told him my throat was not strong, and the air was very damp. With any one else I should have felt irritated at being thus put down, but somehow Mr. Lowe keeps everybody about him under control, in such a quiet unconscious way that you can't feel offended. Of course I took the hint, and we all three tramped on mute as before.

We traced that winding zig-zag path which leads down from the Esplanade, past the bridge

gardens into the town; through the dark deserted streets, past the old church and Castle rock, and on to our own Crescent, where the lights were dancing through the crimson curtains of the bay windows in the dining-room, and the sound of music came rattling down from within. When we had got into the hall safely out of the night air, Mr. Lowe took his plaid again, and after Mrs. Tresilis and I had straightened our toilets we made our appearance in the room.

What a change from our silent walk over those cliffs! Such a whirr and buzz of conversation, or rather *talk*! Isabella Ponde's laugh careering round the room, Miss Scramble's loud voice prating to one of the collegians about a new style of shooting costume that has come up this season, Mr. Golden Brown and Miss Phebe cooing together on one of the sofas, Mr. Stanley prosing through his long periods, and Mr. Penarva firing away his little odds and ends of chit-chat. All this, mingled with the rustle of newspapers and the jingle of the piano, was too wearying, so I came up into my room here, and, wrapping my brown cloak round me, sat down in this great easy chair to think about all that had happened. By and by Mrs. Tresilis began to sing, and the rattle of

voices ceased. It was that song of Beatrice again — how could she sing it to all those people? Then came Haydn's canzonet, "Recollection."

Sitting alone by my window, all seemed so quiet and peaceful. The moon had risen, shimmering and rippling upon the glancing waves; the Castle keep, reared up in the pale light, seemed like a giant warder looking out over the distant headlands. In the pauses of the music I could hear the sea rising and falling upon the rocks. Before she had finished I fell asleep. When I awoke it was broad daylight, and there was the whirl and stir of life all round me.

Yet, gathering up my thoughts, and driving away the foolish fancies of sleep, that I might ponder over the real life of yesterday, it was not the recollection of that music that lingered longest, nor last night's purple sunset and murmuring ocean, nor yet the dreary history of a life which she had told me; but it was that quiet walk home in the dark with silence all around and about us, and Mr Lowe's strong restful presence to take care of us.

I wonder, Maud, what you were doing then. How often I think of you; how often, sitting here alone at my room window, and listening to this

sea that you have never heard, Maud, you come to me with your quiet, gentle little presence! What would you say to me, Maud, if you were here? A more peaceful story than mine, I know, even like this sea, whispering along under the twilight with not a wave to ruffle it. Good night, Maud.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE watercourse in Lingold Wood — how very lovely it looked beneath the quivering August sunshine that Friday evening when Stephen Roden and Maud tracked its rocky ascent!

A green and leafy solitude, turning out of the beaten woodland path, and leading over rough boulders and mossy stones, past overhanging ferny banks and lichen-covered trunks, beneath tangled boughs and great plummy fronds of bracken, along the bed of a winter stream that had cleft its way down from the moorland heights above. No place for fashion or modern costume this, for often there was scarce a passage to be forced through the thick branches of birch and hazel which leaned over the rift, or between the red-stone cliffs clothed over with bright green primula and tufted moss, which girded in the miniature cascade.

A very solitude; absolutely still; with no track of any human footstep about it, no trace of any human handiwork, no sound of any but Nature's own voices—the dropping of water, the cooing of cushat doves, the manifold soft murmur of breezes stealing down along the green aisles of the wood, the rustling of myriads of leaves through which the sunlight played. The Braeton folks never thought of coming here for a walk, or even dreamed that so much beauty lay beyond the little path that turned out from the ordinary road. Even Maud and Mabel in all their woodland rambles had never gone aside to find whither it led, until, one late spring evening, Stephen Roden had come in, his grey eyes bright with pleasure, to tell them that he had found a bit of Scotland in Lingold wood, and to take them there and then follow out its mossy windings. After that they often used to go, and it came to be a very chosen walk for Maud and Stephen in the long still summer evenings, when the day's work was over, and nothing remained but rest.

Wild hyacinths grew there in spring time, purpling over the steep banks with their quiet tinted flowers, and leaving behind, when they

were gone, their thousand clusters of dark green glossy leaves; but in this August time there were no flowers at all, save here and there a regal sceptre of crimson foxglove shooting forth proud and erect from the broken crags above, and making yet more vivid by contrast the pure, intense green of the moss and fern around it. Only for colour now in this warm summer evening, the sunlight came in floods of golden rain, splashing down upon the glancing water, quivering and sparkling upon the leaves, pouring along the rugged sides of the cleft, glinting in and out among the branches, leaping from frond to frond of pencilled fern, hiding away its living threads of light under moss and creeper and starry primula; flickering up amid the broad green hyacinth leaves, flooding with soft amber light the gnarled and decaying trunks of the fallen trees that lay still and motionless across the rift, and then losing itself in a dreamy purple haze on the great sweeps of foliage that clothed the uplands beyond.

All was so very still along the watercourse in Lingold wood. As if Nature, weary with shaping out the huge mountains and black overlapping forests of her wide domains, had chosen this little

nest for peace and quietness, dowering it with all that was most dainty of her handiwork; lacing it over with cunning broidery work of green, and girding it in with sheltering trees and fern fringed banks which shut out all sound of human toil or care; gilding it at early morning time with streaks of glory from the eastern sky, shadowing it at noonday with dark curtains of pine and fir tree that crested the top of the wood, and purpling it over evening by evening with sweeps of warm light rolling from the Marbrook hills away in the west: making it musical too, with the song of birds and the drip drip of innumerable drops of water trickling along over the stones, falling from leaf to leaf, and catching the sunlight as they went. So that there was always rest here, always beauty here, always music and freshness in this little Lingold watercourse, where human hands had never meddled to make or mar its perfectness; where everything had been left just as God made it — very good.

Stephen and Maud had tracked the winding path for a long way, climbing up and up, over the mossy stones, pausing at every turn to look back on the green wilderness beneath them, flecked

with light and shadow, and upward to the golden glitter of the sunshine in the branches overhead. And ever as they went along there was some new beauty, some fresh outlook over the far off hills, or through the green distances of the woodland aisles, or down over the bed of the stream where the rift widened out into the pine-clothed slopes of Mossingay Park, and the grey turrets of the castle rose against a background of moor and heather. Very far down beneath them was the Braeton high road, winding through the thick woods that skirted it in; and there came faintly at times the murmur of the little Mar brook, babbling some pleasant story to itself, busy gossip that it was, as it ran over the loose stones and gravel away to the lake in the park.

At last they rested, when the upward path had become so narrow that they could no longer find their way through it, and he made Maud a place among the wild hyacinth leaves where she might sit under the shadow of one of the mossy crags in a perfect bower of fern and creepers, while the sunlight came glinting in upon her through thick green boughs, and the stream just gurgled along at her feet. No elf or fairy need have wanted more.

This had been a very hard day with Stephen Roden. The whole morning he had been measuring timber in the Mossingay woods, and all through the long bright golden afternoon he had been shut up in the little office room, preparing his quarterly accounts for the Duke. Moreover, there was a sum in them which had been wrongly entered through a mistake of one of the head woodmen, so that they would not balance rightly; and he had travelled up and down, and down and up, the long lines of figures, until his eye was weary and his brain confused, before the error was discovered, and his work completed. He would have been sitting at that office table now, rather than have left the business unfinished; and let the day wear quite out to its close, content so long as he knew that he was doing his duty. For he was very exact, very correct in all that he put his hand to, was Stephen Roden. There was great faithfulness in his way of holding the simplest trust that had once been given to him. Not even Maud herself, dear as she was, ever stole five minutes from him of the time that belonged to the Duke, or diminished by one hair's breadth, the measure of attention which he held needful for the Mossingay concerns. Perhaps it

was this very conscientiousness which made her prize him all the more, knowing how firmly his footsteps always rung out on the broad track of honour. And perhaps it was this too which made the evening rest so pleasant to himself; this knowledge of duties well performed, and days well spent, earning night by night the guerdon of repose.

After he had made Maud a cosy resting place beneath the rock, he leaned up against one of the old fallen trunks and amused himself by winding long sprays of moss in and out of her hair, and laying tiny fern leaves upon her cheeks, watching how the rosy colour shone between their delicate tracery, and how even as he looked, not at the leaves, but at Maud, the warm flush spread and deepened until, with a wilful shake, she lifted her hand and dashed them away, and then leaned her face down among the green brackens that he might not gaze upon it so earnestly. Then he would look at the shadows flickering over her, upon her white little hands, and glossy hair, and her brown cloak, the same brown cloak — Maud was so fond of quiet colours — that he had seen one night, with her under it, coming along the Marbrook road, and one other night, not so

long ago, floating in and out through the green tracks of Braeton plantation. And he thought, — for everything around them was so bright and peaceful — that he would not wish for any greater happiness than just to stand there with Maud beside him, neither talking to her nor listening to her voice, but content with knowing that she was there, quite close to him, so near that, when he stooped down, he could feel her breath upon his cheek, and her long curls touching his shoulder; that he had only to look and see her there, only to hold out his hand and clasp hers, knowing that she belonged to him, to no one but him: that he was always to guide her, to help her along over the rough places of life, to make everything easy and pleasant for her untried feet, — little feet that would be so soon tired, if they had to find their own path, — to keep her near to him for rest and safety, just as he had been doing that evening, just as he would do all through life, — all through life.

It was the thought of this, that made a glad, quiet smile creep up over Stephen Roden's face as he stood by that mossed crag in the Lingold watercourse, watching how the light and shadow played over Maud through the fern leaves. And

it was the utter contrast of her words to the picture which had shaped itself in his heart, that made him start as from some pleasant dream—start so that the fern leaves quivered again, and a green tress of moss that he had just gathered fell from his strong hand with a splash and flutter into the stream beneath, when she said, in her quiet even-toned voice,—

“Mr. Roden, I have been thinking if either of us should die.”

Maud had gone that afternoon to see Mary Rae, and read to her. Coming home alone through the Braeton plantation, along the very path which she and Stephen had trodden together, that May night not long ago, she thought, as indeed she often thought now, how death would look to her if she stood very near it, face to face with it; near enough to feel its cold hands taking hold of hers, and its icy presence closing round her, as Mary Rae did. And with the thought there came a great pain, which told her more than she knew before, how very fast the life that now is had linked her to its hopes and joys; so fast, indeed, that no future which took *them* away could be anything but dreary to her. Sitting there in the Lingold wood, the thought came back again, and

this time she spoke it out, not with any sort of fear, but just because she could always think aloud to him.

He could find no way to answer; the words smote upon him so: as if in the green and flowery summer time, a snow flake should fall from the cloudless sky, and flutter to our feet, lying there cold and gelid, while all else is so bright. He gave one quick glance at Maud. She had gathered some of the long dart-like hyacinth leaves and was braiding them together with just the old peaceful smile upon her face, that he had watched there many a day, somewhat deeper perhaps, and more thoughtful; but peaceful still, with no shadow of anything but the interlacing branches that seemed to quiver to and fro around her. It might only have been a chance thought, he said to himself, quickly come and as quickly gone; and yet he wished she had not spoken it, for it had marred his pleasant picture, and he could not bring back its perfectness. Whispering up the windy trees, and through the long green leafy tracks, and over the clasping ferns and mosses that still held the slant August sunshine within their delicate pencil work, there came those little innocently spoken words —

“If either of us should die!”

And then from the height which they had reached, Stephen Roden looked out over the east country, where the grey tints of early evening were creeping out of their hiding places among the woods and valleys. There Braeton village lay, nestled up in green foliage, the church tower lifting itself above the great old chestnut trees, and the brazen vanes and weathercocks, and the oriel windows of the priory, shining out in the sunshine. Beyond, there came a sweep of brown moorland with lighter coloured rifts, where fern and gorse and purple heather grew. Past that, farther out towards the open country, where the river Mar wound round through the meadows of Mossingay, just over the road that he would have to pass as he went home, there lay a thick, heavy veil of mist, quite hiding the cottage and the lane that led to it, as if with a white shroud, heaving and floating restlessly. It did not reach very far, only just enough to cover the cottage, and the belt of farm land round it, and then it gradually softened off, growing more and more transparent, until through its slight film he could see the distant Downshire hills in the soft pearly grey like tints of twilight, streaked here and

there with a warm purple flush from the setting sun.

This picture, clouded over so strangely just in its middle distance, and then clearing away for a gleam of sunset brightness, was what Stephen Roden looked upon as he stood there, high up along the Lingold watercourse, with Maud sitting by him, braiding those hyacinth leaves, and holding upon her face still a very peaceful smile, her own quiet child-smile that he had learned to love so well. He pointed it out to Maud at the time, and then he never thought of it any more. Neither did she, until many months afterwards, in the next year's August sunlight. Then it all came back upon her with more meaning than she had thought for, when, as she stood within that same mossy shelter, looking out over it, there was another than the old child-smile upon her face.

So it often is with things that we look at in our young and untried life. They would say much to us, but we cannot listen to them. By and by, when the open vision comes, we shall remember them again. And we shall know how very full of beauty and truth they were, if only we would have received them, and taken them

home to our hearts in that first spring time of youth.

But the sun was going down now in Lingold wood, and the glancing lights and shadows had flickered away to make room for evening quietness. Stephen and Maud came down the water-course together again, hand in hand; he helping her over all the rough places, trying the stones with his own firm tread to know that they were sure before he trusted her upon them, and holding back the rough branches that she might go along more easily. As he did so, the old pleasant feeling came over him, those cold little words faded away; he held her hand close under his strong arm that he might feel how warm and quick with life it was; and with the touch all was bright again. True, there was no sunlight now for shine or shadow upon the landscape round, and the picture that those little words had darkened would not come together again as it had been only half an hour ago. But she was with him still, as near as ever, and that was all he needed for rest and peace,—just to have Maud. And so through the grey twilight they came home together.

It is ten o'clock, and Maud is sitting in her

own room, writing up the story of the day. It is a habit Stephen Roden has taught her, and she finds it not altogether useless for profit or for pleasure, to hold the past thus steadily before her, and talk with herself as night by night comes on, of all that she has done and thought and enjoyed. Perhaps, too, she may be thinking that some day she will read it all over again, not alone. One may trace the story in her face as she sits there at the table with the lamplight shining clear upon her, pencilling the outline of her small head on the white window curtains and the quick flittering shadow of her moving fingers on the paper. Pausing now and shading her eyes, the afternoon's visit comes back to her. It is not so easy to write about that, for one single little thought starts up ever and anon, and will not let her finish until it has been looked at and laid to rest: if she were standing where Mary Rae stands, and stepping forth from all human friendship into such a future!

She will think about it again next Sunday; many things seem clear to her then, seen in that day's light, which in busy working life were hard to solve. And now it is evening sunshine again, and she is climbing the Lingold watercourse with

Stephen Roden. There is no need to pause in that story, except to think how pleasant it was; how merrily the slant light flashed upon the leaves, and the sparkling waters leaped down from rock to rock; and how restful his presence had been, how entirely it filled her with a content which shut out both Memory and Hope, and made her whisper to herself, as so very few can ever do, "I am happy now."

So the story is finished, and with the reflection of that evening stillness yet upon her face, Maud packs away her book. There is a little scrap of paper lying in the desk, and smiling, she begins to write upon it. It is not a letter; no, that cannot be it; it is too tiny for that, and she stops and dreams over it so often, then colours up and begins again with a half-wondering, half-enjoying look. Simple little thing! It is her name that she is writing, the name that will be hers so soon, the name that he is to give her, to be hers for always, "Maud Roden." No, Maud Harcourt Roden, for she will keep her own old noble maiden name too, the heritage of so many generations. "Maud Harcourt Roden." "Mrs. Stephen Roden," how strangely it sounds, as she whispers it to herself, yet how very pleasant in

its strangeness ! How very full of hope and quiet gladness any one might be to whom that name belonged ; what a great possession it would be the earnest of ! - And then she leans her head down upon her hand, and thinks of the time when she first heard it, of the time when to her it was a name and nothing more, before it had gathered any of her life round it, or wakened any thrill as it did now if even a stranger said it by chance. " Maud Roden." Just once again she writes it and smiles. And now she will pray for him.

Simple little Maud !

Meanwhile, holding the clasp of her fingers yet warm upon his hand, Stephen is going home down that long, dark Mossingay lane, over which, in the early August evening, he had watched the white cloud lie.

CHAPTER XVII.

Scarbro', August.—I wonder what Maud is doing just now. I had a long letter from her this morning, a complete calendar of her home life. What a busy little life it is! It was just as I thought on Friday night: whilst Mrs. Tresilis and I were on the cliffs, she and Stephen Roden were down in Lingold wood, watching the sunset upon the lake, and afterwards they went up together along that first watercourse, farther through the wood. Then after that, she tells me, they had a long, long cosy evening of music and singing; whilst we three were so silent coming home in the dark.

It is wonderful how, after a few weeks, one can settle down comfortably into almost any sort of life. How little I thought when I came here a month ago, I should ever realise that almost home sort of feeling that I have now. At first I could do

nothing but pick out faults and criticise the people who came, but now I am beginning to be a little more charitable, and look for the sweet as well as the sour.

I am amused to see how we draw off in little coteries according to our tastes. Miss Ponde has wonderfully cooled down in her manifestations of friendship since she finds out that I have no brothers, and live in a quiet out of the way country place like Braeton. She passes her time almost entirely now at the upper end of the room in company with the collegians, Miss Scrambles, and two or three fresh comers; while Papa, Mr. Lowe, Mrs. Tresilis, and I, have drifted down to the other end, where we live on quietly and cosily together. There is a good deal of friendliness about Mr. Lowe when one has broken through the upper crust of reserve which covers him; and one thing at any rate you are comfortably sure of about him, namely, that he will never say any more than he means, or make any professions which he is not able and willing to carry out. I don't know after all whether these quiet, steady going sorts of characters are not more to be admired than those impulsive folks who rush into a violent attachment at first sight, — with an eye

to male relations, perhaps, as Miss Ponde did, — and after boring you to death with confidences and protestations, cool down at the month's end, and leave you to yourself.

I have an appreciation too, of Mr. Lowe's intellectual tastes since I have found out that he is a great admirer of John Foster. He saw the first volume lying on the table the day after he came, and has been studying it ever since in his spare moments. Placing this side by side with Mr. Stanley's despatch of that thought-laden book, my opinion of Mr. Lowe mounts fifty degrees. Foster's *Life and Correspondence* is a sort of touchstone of mental excellence with me. If I meet with people — and I have met with a good many — who stigmatise it as dull, prosy, fanciful, and morbid, I shake hands with them internally and say good-bye, being satisfactorily assured that I shall never make real, true, worthy friends of them. But again, when any one, and especially a man, reads it with interest, and that quiet, thorough, intense sort of enjoyment which Mr. Lowe evidently feels, I straightway set him down as having the true metal in him.

Mr. Lowe reminds me a good deal of John Foster, in little things especially. He is silent

and reserved to a degree, yet very kindhearted. He has the same sort of distaste to general society (in which I heartily agree with him), and he has that intense love of Nature, that power of finding out beauty in all her various phases and manifestations, and of reading out the analogies between her workings and those of our own human life, which make Foster's "Thoughts" so interesting. I like to hear him and Papa talking over their favourite books, and I often contrast their conversation with the vacant idle talk of the people at the other end of the room, which is chiefly about new novels, fresh styles of dress which they have seen on the promenade, or some pretty way of arranging the hair or curling their moustaches. Poor things! It is a very pleasant feeling to be proud of one's friends, so proud as I am of Papa and Mamma and Maud; and to be quite sure that wherever they go they will win respect. If I were Mr Lowe's sister I should feel just in that way for him. I wonder if he has any sisters. I never hear him say anything about them. The nearest approach to his home concerns that I remember was when he was saying something to papa about "my people up in the Glen," which confirms my

notion that he is a clergyman. And then he is so thoroughly up on all theological subjects, that he must have gone through a regular course of study. I do like superior people.

Thursday.—A fresh lady and gentleman came last Monday, a Mr. and Mrs. Birdon from the North. She is evidently a woman of education and refinement, and I could almost fancy she had been a governess, for she has that subdued, quiet air about her which they acquire after some years of isolated life. Mr. Birdon is a great, burly, rough-haired man, some ten years her superior in age, which is the only superiority he has. His fat pursy face and strongly tinted nose tell of former dinners, and when he comes in from his evening walk, which he always takes alone, he brings a scent of brandy and cigars which makes one wish him at the bottom of the sea. His talk is of pretty girls and fine women; he ogles the housemaids as they wait at table, and criticises the foot and ankle of every lady that walks past our terrace. As for his speech, he patronises slang to such an extent that I, having no brothers, and being therefore unacquainted with that peculiar vocabulary, find the want of a dictionary whenever he opens his

mouth. He calls his hat a "tile," his acquaintances "bricks," his friends "jolly bricks," and those who are very closely entwined round his heart's best affections, "prime old coveys." His elegant wife, who, judging from appearances, does not belong to this last division, he dignifies with the appellation of "old girl." He never drinks, but "takes a drop of something to wet his whistle." He ignores eating altogether, and calls it, "turning out to grass." People by his showing don't die, they "go defunct," "mizzle," or "set off to kingdom come." The father and mother of this precious jewel of a son are spoken of as the "governor" and the "old woman." His face is as round as the full moon, but if it were ten times rounder and fuller there would not be room enough for the low sensual expression he puts into it. Don't I wish he would go away, or, to use his own elegant expression, "make himself scarce" so far as our vision of him is concerned? After dinner he loosens his cravat, unbuttons his waistcoat, sends his wife here and there and everywhere to fetch him footstools, cushions or newspapers, and goes off to sleep, a great, dull, immovable mass of humanity.

I don't know much about what are called men

of the world, we live so quietly at Braeton, and I have not often read books that show the very darkest side of human life; but it seems to me at times that there are things to be known, deeper and sadder than any I have ever yet thought of.

I have never seen anything that so thrills me through with horror as the expression of his face sometimes, when he looks at Mrs. Tresilis; there is such a quiver of gloating enjoyment over his bleared features, it reminds me of faces I have seen of the old Roman emperors, so utterly low and debased. Is it possible to have the body of a man with the soul of an animal? I think it is. Oh Walter, my little brother Walter! who died so long ago; how much better, how infinitely better it is that you should be lying there under that tall old yew tree that shadows our window at Braeton church, than that you should ever have lived to be to any woman what this man is to his wife!

Poor Mr. Birdon! And yet he was once an innocent little child, a peaceful, unconscious child, looking up with his blue eyes, now so bleared and thick and unholy, into his mother's face, and lisping out to the "old woman" some

simple evening prayer, such as our brother used to say. Oh Walter! how contented I am that you died! When I walk along the sands now and see mothers carrying out their little babies in the sunshine, and guiding tiny children's feet among the shining pebbles, I pray that they may never grow up like Mr. Birdon. Better they should lie quietly buried, like our Walter, and leave behind them in their mothers' hearts only pleasant memories. I never thought of it until he came, but I know now that there are some things worse, oh! how much worse, than death for those we love.

How came she to marry him, that quiet, elegant, refined woman? Was she tired of plodding on through the dull round of governess life, and so gave herself away for the sake of having a *house*, not a *home*, of her own? Or was she poor and unbefriended, and did he dazzle her with his guineas and scrip and shares? Or was she once a wild, romantic girl who rushed into matrimony for the excitement of the thing, and then woke up to find herself bound for life to a body of which the soul was wanting,—a worse destiny than those Roman prisoners had, whom their tyrants chained to corpses? Anyhow, one can

only say of her, as we say of many others, poor thing! poor thing!

Mrs. Tresilis, speaking to me the other day of a friend who had been in almost constant affliction ever since she married, said, "She has had no troubles which she could not speak of to others, and so gain sympathy. We should not call those deep or utter griefs which others can lessen by sharing them with us." And this is the bitterness I should think of poor Mrs. Birdon's life, that her sorrow must be borne alone, that she must shut it up and keep a quiet look, when her very heart is being stung with disgust and disappointment.

What a strange sort of feeling it must be to be ashamed of one's husband; to be always anxiously watching to screen his deficiencies, and cover his ignorances; to apologise for his failings without wounding his self-esteem, and to be continually on quake-bridge lest one's lord and master should "make a fool of himself," as the phrase goes, and provoke other people to laugh at and deride him whom you have bound yourself to honour and obey. Often and often I have noticed the look of painful humiliation on Mrs. Birdon's face when that man made some glaring blunder which it

was impossible for her to smoothe over. He is very fond of plunging head foremost into any conversation that is going on, whether he knows anything about it or not, and he turns furious if she attempts to set him straight. So long as she is in the room, her presence—for she is a thorough lady—commands a certain sort of respect for him; but if he commits himself, as he often enough does when she is absent, the ladies simper at him, and the gentlemen laugh. I could crush them for it. It has made me think more highly than ever I did of Mr. Lowe, to see how he always keeps a grave, serious countenance in the midst of Mr. Birdon's unmeaning nonsense, and how kindly yet unobtrusively he endeavours to hold the poor man from falling lower than he has already done. How I loathe and abominate people who can laugh at anything bad, who can enjoy a low joke, or amuse themselves at the expense of a poor fallen thing like this man. Oh, I never thought so much before of a verse I have read somewhere in the Bible: "Fools make a mock at sin."

It is astonishing the hold Mr. Lowe has got over him, and the power he has to keep him within reasonable bounds. I have noticed some-

times at dinner when Mr. Birdon has had as much wine as is good for him, Mr. Lowe very quietly keeps the decanters away from him, and manages so that he shall not need to pass them to any one else. I know poor Mrs. Birdon looks up to him as a sort of guardian angel over her husband. Mr. Lowe has a quiet, authoritative way which is quite inexplicable to me. Those uppish young men who used to laugh at what they called his "slowness," are most completely let down into the valley of humiliation. There is a something which cannot be gainsaid or resisted in his calm, self-controlled manner. I think, if he told me to do anything, I should be obliged to do it. I never saw any one until now that I could feel afraid of, and yet somehow I feel as if I could not disobey Mr. Lowe. He would not say anything to me if I did, but he would *look*, and there is something which makes one feel strangely subdued in that look, not angry, but so keen and searching.

It seems to me very grand that a man, a Christian man, for I know he is a Christian, should carry about with him this acknowledged presence of power, putting a check on sin and wickedness wherever he goes; that his whole bearing and ex-

pression, and even his very silence, should speak for the right. It is very noble.

I remember once, a long time ago, seeing a Pre-Raphaelite painting that was exhibited at Marbrook, "Christ the Light of the World." I went again and again to look at it, for nothing else but to study that countenance. I used to hear other people admire the gems in the crown, the working of the robe, the minuteness and the accuracy of the details, the beauty of the allegorical symbols, the exquisite effect of light and shade, the brilliance of the colouring: but I only saw the face. It was so pure, so noble, so worthy, with the very spirit of majesty and mercy breathing through it. How it is I cannot tell, but often when I look at Mr. Lowe, that picture comes back upon me, and I feel a strange indefinable hush and quietness. So far as one may compare things earthly with things heavenly, I am reminded of that earnest, yearning expression, that horror for evil, yet pity for the evil doer, which seems to me so Christlike. Oh, he is good, this Mr. Lowe of ours: I feel so safe whenever he is near us, and he does so try to better that poor man.

Maud, what are you doing now, as I sit here

at my room window this Thursday evening? Is the sky as quiet over you as it is over me; draped with curtains of tenderest, softest grey, brightening into silver white, or deepening into grave dun tints, and sending down upon this calm sea the same even range of colour? Does the wind come sweeping up the long leafy reaches of Lingold wood with the same cool rustling sound as it brings to me over these rippling waves? Is everything just so still, just so full of rest? And are you thinking, as I do now, what a noble thing, what a truly noble thing it is to be a Christian — such a Christian as ——? but you have never seen him, so you cannot be thinking that. Oh, Maud, I wish you knew him!

No, you are sitting under the old beech tree, and my rose—it must be full in flower now, since I came here—is dropping its pink leaves at your feet, and that lavender bush we planted last autumn is sending you ever and anon a pleasant remembrance of its presence near you. And Stephen Roden is by your side, and you are not thinking at all;—when we are happy we don't think, Maud;—only blessing the glad, beautiful, restful Now, and drinking that full, full cup, which I suppose comes to all once in a lifetime.

Will it ever come to me, I wonder? Could I take it, and be thankful if it came? I don't know. I suppose that would depend on who brought it to me.

Good night, Maud.

Saturday. — Our room is quite filling. Let me not forget to record the advent of one who evidently thinks "London stout" of himself, and expects that we shall do the same. Mr. Eugene Evenstill is a poetical youth of a somewhat similar stamp to Mr. Golden Brown, only more inclined to view life from the tragic than the pensive side. Isabella Ponde thinks him very striking, for as she confided to me when first we came, she has a passion for black hair, especially if it be very long, a pale complexion, and general air of languor. So she has handed over her polite attentions to Mr. Evenstill, and sings him the strangest flyaway songs she can think of, full of fate and destiny and blighted hopes, and so forth; while he turns over the leaves for her, listening with eyes solemnly upraised, and a firm conviction that at last he has found some one who understands him. If he only knew how much he is mistaken! — but it is no concern of mine to tell

him that, so he must even find it out for himself. I shouldn't wonder if Miss Ponde coaxes her mamma to stay another fortnight, in order that she may hunt down this new game. Our two "sketchy" individuals are gone, so is the dowager in moire antique. To supply their places we have got a portly mamma and her two daughters. They seem inclined to be very stately and exclusive, and talk largely between themselves of their "place" in Warwickshire, the London season, and the inconvenience of not having brought their private carriage. They are afflicted with a pedigree, and have a finely-bound copy of "Burke's Landed Gentry," which is always lying about in the bay window, with a blank crested envelope at the chapter which enlarges upon the family of the Veres of Veregrave, Warwickshire.

I am sick of seeing that crest about; it is a hand and arm jerked out, in act to throw something at you; it does give me such an uncomfortable impression of pugilistic intentions. The Miss Veres have it embroidered on their handkerchiefs and on their own private dinner napkins, and on the wrappers of their trunks and the straps of their portmanteaus. It clenches its aristocratic fist in menacing attitude on the back of Mrs.

Vere's writing portfolio, which lies on our drawing-room table, on her stamp box and pencil case. It bristles in black and white on the summit of every sheet of note paper I have seen them use, and asserts itself on their cream-laid envelopes. Miss Georgiana Vere is embroidering it on a pair of black velvet slippers, her sister is perpetuating it in a piece of bead-work for an ottoman. Mamma Vere is working a nightcap with this same ubiquitous fist in the very centre of the crown; and, casting a stray glance yesterday into their united work-basket, I saw this same portion of the human anatomy struggling into incipient existence as part of a leatherwork bracket. I do think, by constantly dwelling upon the fact of this crest, their own digital extremities have assumed a similar formation, for the eldest Miss Vere's hands, when not engaged in doing anything else, double themselves up as though born to it.

Aristocracy in a four-wheeled carriage, — but there is the dinner bell again!

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